

BUILDERS  
OF  
MODERN  
INDIA

**GANGADHARAO  
DESHPANDE**

R. S. NARAYAN










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DESHPANDE**





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*BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA*

# GANGADHARRAO DESHPANDE

Dr. R.S. NARAYAN

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## About the Series

The object of the series is the publication of biographies of those eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental in our national renaissance and the struggle for independence.

It is essential for the present and coming generations to know something about these men and women. Except in a few cases, no authoritative biographies are available. The series has been planned to remove this lacuna and comprise handy volumes containing simple and short biographies of our eminent leaders written by competent persons who know their subject well. The books in this series are not intended either to be comprehensive studies or to replace more elaborate biographies.

Though desirable, it may not be possible to publish the biographies in chronological order. The work of writing these lives has to be entrusted to persons who are well equipped to do so and therefore, for practical reasons, it is possible that there might be no historical sequence observed. It is hoped, however, that within a short period all eminent national personalities will figure in this series.

Shri R.R. Diwakar is the General Editor of this series.





## Foreword

GANGADHARRAO DESHPANDE was wellknown as the Lion of Karnataka. His biography as presented by this series of the Builders of Modern India has so many important features which are hardly found normally in the lives of many others. The writer has taken care to keep him as the central figure, be it the most notable Congress Session of 1924 in Belgaum, which was the only session over which Mahatma Gandhi presided, or the historic meeting of the Gandhi Seva Sangh at Hudli, Deshpande's own tiny village, in which Gandhi took the decision of Congress participation in the elections under the Government of India Act of 1935. Deshpande was born and bred in a village but his leadership was built in the city of Belgaum which became the centre of both political and constructive activities of the Congress in Karnataka.

In his early days, Deshpande though inclined more towards social reform, came under the influence of Lokmanya Tilak and till the latter's end in July 1920 led the people both of Karnataka and Maharashtra in the tough struggle for *Swaraj* or Home Rule advocated by Tilak. Deshpande was a distinguished orator in both Kannada and Marathi. When Gandhiji appeared on the political arena, Deshpande switched over to his politics but not before he convinced himself that Gandhiji's Non-violence was made of sterner steel than the wordy and intellectual extremism of Surendranath and some others. It was under his dynamic leadership that Karnataka came to be known as Gandhiji's Province, both by leading a remarkable No-tax Campaign in the district of North Kanara, the last word in Civil Disobedience, and by the

vigorous promotion of *Khadi* and village Industries, so dear to Gandhiji.

He never sought for any office in the Congress organisation but he was naturally chosen as the first President of the Karnataka Provincial Committee when the Nagpur Congress in 1920, divided India on linguistic basis, for Congress activities. He was the Reception Committee Chairman of the Belgaum Congress Session. He was a member of the Congress Working Committee for several years. He was the Chairman of the Karnataka Khadi and Village Industries Association and his village Hudli became a Centre of *Khadi* production humming with the music of hundreds of *Charkhas*.

Be it known, however, that it was not a bed of roses for him to rise to the top of leadership. The police suspected him in Tilak's days as a revolutionary and plots were hatched to dub him as dealing with bombs and arms. The Kolhapur State Darbar which was adjacent to the district of Belgaum was not friendly to any Brahmin leadership and cooperated with the British Police in hatching cases. Of course, during the Gandhian Campaign of Civil Disobedience, he courted arrest by breaking the Salt Act. He was also hauled up for Sedition and sentenced to imprisonment.

Right from the beginning however, he faced every obstacle, be it from opponents or from his own people, with the courage of a brave fighter. He had gathered round himself a small batch of followers who stood by him through thick and thin. He was a great patriot at heart and his loyalty to Tilak in his earlier days, and his devotion later to Gandhian leadership were exemplary. It was not a kind of blind following nor a kind of mere marching under some banner or the other. Along with

a genuine love for the freedom of the country, he had always the intellectual capability of judging things and giving a bold lead to his people. His oratorical powers were a blend of emotion and logic and he had a mastery over expression in Marathi as well as Kannada, which is very rare. He had followers and admirers both in Karnataka and Maharashtra and the notable part he played both during Tilak's leadership and Gandhiji's stewardship of the Struggle for Freedom, is sure to be remembered for decades to come. The younger generation may well derive inspiration from the life of a villager and his rise to the leadership of his own province and the nation.

R.R. DIWAKAR

New Delhi  
19 May 1987





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## Early Days

### 1

GANGADHARRAO DESHPANDE of Belgaum in Karnataka is one of those outstanding national leaders, who toiled hard and suffered intensely for the freedom of the country. He played a dominant role in rousing the people, especially in Karnataka and Maharashtra, for patriotic action, when the political climate was surcharged with a strong belief of divine dispensation towards the well-established British administration. He enjoyed the unique privilege of being the right-hand man of both Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi in succession. His dedicated services, extending well over half a century, constitute a beacon not only for the present and succeeding generations of India but also for those of other countries in similar circumstances.

Coming from a rich, respectable and leading land-owning family and endowed with sound education and unalloyed qualities of leadership, Deshpande came to occupy the front rank in the struggle for national freedom. In his early youth, his bubbling enthusiasm for national service found expression in revolutionary activities. But, no sooner did he come under the spell of Lokmanya Tilak in 1906 than he chose to follow the constructive path of mass awakening for speedy action. His work during the Swadeshi Movement of 1905-06 centered round boycott of British goods, encouragement

of *swadeshi* goods, promotion of national education and opposition to partition of Bengal. By his leonine activities he came to be endeared to and respected by the people as the Lion of Karnataka.

The mantle leadership passed from Tilak to Gandhiji and Deshpande discerned in Gandhiji an extraordinary moral power to open up the gates of national freedom. He envisioned that the life-mission of Tilak would find its fulfilment at the hands of Gandhiji. His association with Gandhiji grew so close as the years passed that the former was looked upon as a true reflection of his master.

His zeal for constructive programme, chalked out by Gandhiji, lasted till he breathed his last. He had involved himself heart and soul in it and his native village of Hudli near Belgaum became a humming centre of *khadi* and village industries. He was the chairman of the Karnataka branch of the All-India Spinners' Association and the All-India Village Industries Association for a number of years and veteran workers in the Congress such as Hanumanthrao Koujalgi of Bijapur rallied round him. Several centres in the districts of Belgaum, Dharwar, Bijapur and South Kanara were established by them and they produced *khadi* which commended itself to the whole of India. The constructive programme enabled the Gandhian workers to come into close contact with the rural population and, in consequence, there was political awakening amongst the villagers.

Deshpande's enthusiasm for political activity was not less pronounced. He was the first and foremost from Karnataka to respond to the repeated calls of the Mahatma to suffer and sacrifice for the cause of national freedom. Whenever political work took a back seat, he was at the driving wheel of the constructive programme.



It was his unique privilege to play host to the Belgaum Congress session in 1924, over which Mahatma Gandhi ever presided. It was again his singular privilege to organise the Gandhi Seva Sangh's conference in 1937, at Hudli his native village. He was at the helm and the guiding spirit when Gandhiji toured Karnataka in 1927 for the promotion of *khadi* and again in 1934 for the uplift of Harijans.

The Belgaum Congress session was a land-mark in the history of the Congress, in the programme of work which held sway till 1929-30, and in the direction and emphasis on work in Deshpande's own life. Gandhiji prescribed spinning as one of the conditions for franchise for Congress workers. But, it did not last long. The Swaraj Party had emerged, advocating council-entry as leading to freedom. Gandhiji did not want the Congress to split on that account and allowed the Swaraj Party to function under the banner of the Congress. Yet, the most important aspect of the session was the importance Gandhiji gave to *khadi* and constructive work, especially in the villages.

Later on in 1928, when the council-goers were disillusioned as they could not make any substantial dent in the policies of the Government, Motilal Nehru convened an All-Parties Conference to appoint a Constitution Committee to draw up a Constitution for India, which could be acceptable to all political parties. The idea was to confront the Government with a unified demand for the implementation of such a Constitution. When the recommendations of the Committee, underscoring the grant of dominion status, were not accepted by the government, the Congress, at its Lahore session in 1929, decided to demand complete independence. On 26 January 1930, the whole nation took the independence pledge and decided to fight

for it. On 6 April, Gandhiji violated the Salt Act at Dandi in Gujarat, inaugurating the Salt Satyagraha movement. Deshpande defied the law by auctioning the contraband salt at Belgaum on the same day and courted arrest. R.R. Diwakar, then President of the Pradesh Congress Committee, set up a *satyagraha* camp at Ankola in North Kanara district to carry on the campaign. Volunteers, trained by Dr. N. S. Hardikar, founder of the Hindusthani Seva Dal, offered *satyagraha* in batches. Diwakar, accompanied by his wife, Radhabai, led a batch from Hubli. He declared that it was a unique occasion as the leader, Gandhiji was unique in his non-violent methods; the war declared against the British was non-violent and its main aspect to begin with, was picking up untaxed salt from the sea-shore by Gandhiji at Dandi, to be followed by millions and millions throughout India, a war which was in a way symbolic, a war in which the weakest in physique and yet the strongest in heart took part.

When the whole country was in a state of unrest, the Government had to come down for conciliation, which led to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March 1931. Gandhiji attended the Second Round Table Conference at London as the sole representative of the Congress, but returned empty-handed, as the British rulers stuck to their ignoble policy of 'divide and rule'. He was soon arrested and the civil disobedience movement was rejuvenated. In North Kanara district of Karnataka, villagers in a large number participated in the no-tax campaign, braving confiscation of their land and property. The campaign was called off in 1934 by the Patna resolution of the All-India Congress Committee.

The Government then prepared the ground for the introduction of provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act of 1935. The question whether the



Congress should work for the reforms, was hotly debated. The Gandhi Seva Sangh, at its Hudli session, attended by Gandhiji and almost all important Congress leaders, discussed it. When it was decided that all Congressmen should work for the success of the Party at the hustings, Deshpande, readily responded to the call. He again played a prominent role in the formation of Congress Ministries in seven states, especially in the erstwhile composite Bombay province. He was largely responsible for the installation of B.G. Kher as the Premier of Bombay.

When the World War II broke out in 1939, the British Government also involved India in it without even referring the matter to the popularly-elected Ministries in the country. The Congress High Command had no option but to give a call to the Ministries to resign. The period of the Congress in office thus turned out to be no more than a honey-moon. While the Congress did not want to impede the British war-effort, its self-respect demanded positive action at least symbolically. Gandhiji devised a plan by which chosen individual Congressmen declared against all war and offered *satyagraha*. Over 30,000 Congressmen courted imprisonment. Gandhiji was not arrested. So was Deshpande free from arrest.

Later, in August 1942, the Congress at its sessions in Bombay demanded the British to quit India. As soon as the call was given by the All-India Congress Committee on August 7 and 8, the alien government arrested the Congress leaders and workers everywhere with lightning speed. Deshpande was taken into custody on his return to Belgaum.

When the War ended in 1945, elections to British Parliament were held and the Labour Party came to power. The Attlee Government decided to grant freedom and

negotiations were started which culminated in India becoming an independent nation on 15 August 1947. Deshpande rejoiced at the consummation of his sacrifice and suffering.

Much of the credit for attracting both Lingayat and other communities in Karnataka to the Congress-fold should go to Deshpande. He knew fully well that the mass leadership of the Congress would have eventually to pass on from the microscopic minority of Brahmins to the major communities of Lingayats and Vakkaligas. He earnestly endeavoured to inculcate a spirit of robust nationalism in them.

When the reorganization of the States was on the anvil, the Fazl Ali Commission called on Deshpande at Belgaum. He made it abundantly clear that there was a strong case for the formation of a linguistic state for the Kannada-speaking people and that Belgaum should be included in that State. His views were categorical and unequivocal, and they were given due weight by the Commission.

As age advanced, Deshpande devoted himself to spiritual pursuits under the benign guidance of R.D. Ranade a saint and a reputed philosopher. He was convinced that real inner peace was available only in spiritual practices with implicit faith in them.

## 2

Deshpande belonged to the Rig Vedic Deshastha sect of the Brahmin community. His ancestors migrated initially from Bidar to Bijapur and settled down at Hudli, a small town at the foothills of the Western Ghats in Belgaum taluka. Hudli is about 25 kilometres from Belgaum City. His father was a *vatandar* (*inamdar*). The land of the region, receiving over 60 cm. rainfall annually, is fer-



tile. Sugarcane is presently cultivated extensively; other crops grown include *jowar*, cotton and tobacco. Cultivators today belong to either Lingayat or Beda community. Hudli is near Sooldhal railway station. This railway line was laid as far back as in 1887.

Hudli was at one time a well-known weaving centre and its dhoties and sarees had a wide market in and around the region. The weaving profession later languished but got a fillip when Gandhiji launched his *khadi* programme in 1921. Hudli is now a fairly well-developed town, having a population of over 5,000. Population is growing, while the cultivable land is not. The *ryots* are, alas, as poor as ever. The *vatans* have now been abolished and *vatandars* are only relics of the past. Hudli was a gift to a Muslim family by an Adilshahi king of Bijapur. Deshpande clan was of an older order and the Deshpandes used to be more influential in official circles than the Inamdars. The Inamdar of Hudli belonged to the Syed lineage and his ancestors lived as fakirs. The *inam* came to them as Duwagir Fakirs. During the Peshwa times, the *inams* were confirmed by issuing certificates (*sanads*) to holders.

When Gangadharrao Deshpande came of age, he came to know that the *sanads* of his family were in the name of Keshavrao, belonging to the sixth previous generation. Keshavrao was efficient in his work. He was also liberal with his purse, inasmuch as he built temples in the region and gifted lands for their maintenance. Keshavrao's grandson as well as Deshpande's great grandfather, Balakrishnarao, was no less powerful. Not only did he add to the family properties but also acquired a hillock close to Pachapur. His association with Nipanikar Appa Saheb during the close of the Peshwa era, enhanced his local prestige and influence considerably.

Under the British rule, the locally influential people were offered supervisory and administrative posts of importance. Balakrishnarao was made a *Mamlatedar*, having jurisdiction over a vast area including Hubli and Shiggaon *talukas* of the Dharwar district. He had three sons; the second was Gangadharrao, who loyally served the British masters. Gangadharrao could obviously not visualise that his grandson and his namesake would rebel against that very British rule and lose, in consequence, the very *vatan*, which he had nourished very carefully.

Gangadharrao's wife, Krishnabai, was an ambitious lady. When her husband died, she took upon herself the control of the domestic affairs and made arrangements for the education of her son, Balakrishna. Balakrishna passed the *mulki* examination when he was 18. He had earlier been married. His eldest son, Gangadharrao Deshpande, was born on 31 March 1871 at Jalalpur on the bank of the Krishna river.

Deshpande's uncle, Appa Saheb, went about his job on horse-back and frequently took his nephew with him. With his age, Deshpande developed a strong desire for horse-riding and never missed an opportunity to enjoy it.

Balakrishna could have joined Government service but spurned it to become a *vakil*. He started his legal practice at Belgaum. During vacation, the family used to go to Hudli, where Deshpande spent most of his time roaming about in the garden, plucking mangoes and relishing them.

Deshpande started learning when he was about 5. Although his mother-tongue was Kannada, his education at school in Belgaum started in Marathi language, which was popular among the local people. After four years of study at Number 2 School, Deshpande joined



Number 1 School for further education. He was given private tuition in Vedic literature also, lest he should forget the Hindu culture and tradition. Later he joined the Bhate School where English was the medium of instruction. He was greatly benefited by the teaching of English by Bhate himself.

## 3

Deshpande even as a boy developed a taste for dramas and was ever an eager spectator. Annasaheb Kirloskar was at that time an accomplished play-wright and his *Krishna Parijatha* in Kannada was very popular. He became a celebrity of the Marathi stage also, as his dramas *Shakuntala* and *Subhadra Parinaya* were enacted at Bombay and Pune with great success. These dramas attracted huge audience in Belgaum as well.

Deshpande joined the Sardar High School after three years of education at the Bhate School. Among the school-mates of Deshpande were some who later played a big role in public life and served people in Belgaum. D.V. Belvi, marked out for his extraordinary intelligence, was in the seventh standard. K.R. Natu became an officer in the Law Department of Government. G.L. Gajendra-gadkar rose to retire as a Deputy Collector. Bhadbhade became a medical practitioner in Belgaum.

As Deshpande's father was a strict disciplinarian, the boy developed timidity, which persisted in him throughout his life. His grandmother even taunted him as a dumb boy. In the class, once a week all the students had to speak on a given subject. Deshpande would invariably be the very last and trembling and faltering, would speak a few sentences. Nonetheless, whatever he spoke was no repetition of what his class-mates had earlier

spoken and his freshness of outlook endeared him to the teacher. Later, when he used to address meetings, he ever endeavoured to avoid repetition of points made earlier and he would never repeat if avoidable. Whatever he spoke used to be effective and he would often carry away the audience emotionally with him. Thus were sown the seeds of his future oratory.

When Balakrishna realised his mistake, he gave up his rigidity and began to take his son with him whenever he visited mofussil towns on professional work. Balakrishna took him also to court to watch the proceedings in important cases. Thus, Deshpande became familiar not only with the names of great jurists of his time like Pherozeshah Mehta and Telang but also met some prominent vakils like Sir Chowbal, Ganapatrao Kirloskar, Shamrao Vittal, G.N. Nadkarni and M.C. Apte.

Deshpande, as a boy, had accompanied his father to Bombay and Pune. There was then no railway line connecting Belgaum with Pune. He and his father, covering 120 kilometres on a bullock cart in about 26 hours, reached the port of Vengurla on the west coast. From there, they proceeded by boat to Bombay. Deshpande felt a little frightened on embarking, but felt the next 48 hours of voyage a really thrilling experience. At Bombay, the father and son stayed with M.C. Apte at Girgaum.

So long as in Bombay, Deshpande daily went out for sight-seeing. One day, he was taken by Apte to the High Court to watch the proceedings. Apte appeared in a case and Deshpande thought that his arguments were convincing.

The return journey was by rail from Bombay to Pune. It was Deshpande's first rail journey. Whenever the train



passed through tunnels, the passengers shouted—Pundalikvarad Hari Vittal in exultation and Deshpande felt thrilled. The journey took not less than six hours. Though the stay at Pune was just for a day, Deshpande visited some places of interest. He was greatly impressed with the ubiquitous *pagadi*, the red head-dress of men. He noted also with surprise that women wore chappals, such a practice was then non-existent in Belgaum.

## 4

Deshpande was married at a very tender age according to the family custom. He was in his mid-teens, while his bride was under twelve.

Deshpande's father died in 1912 and his mother in 1929. The mother, so long as she lived, drudged most of her time daily in the kitchen. Deshpande's grandmother, who managed the domestic chores, was such a dominant person that no marital frivolities were allowed at home. Her dominance had its effect on the young couple also with the result that Deshpande's wife could not develop close rapport with her husband. Deshpande nursed thereby a genuine grievance in his life. His timidity was another reason responsible for his marital unhappiness.

Deshpande failed in the matriculation examination held in 1887 and was deeply depressed. As though to cheer him up, his father took him to the Congress session at Madras. This was the third session. In Belgaum of those days, Congress message was slowly but surely spreading as in other parts of the country. Two young law graduates, Vishnu Raghunath Natu and Keshav Ganesh Ajarekar, had just then started practice at the Belgaum bar. Natu also taught English to Deshpande's father. He grew to become a Legislator too. He had acquaintance with

Lokmanya Tilak and was responsible for promoting public activities in Belgaum. Ajarekar also grew to become a prominent member of the bar and was for a term the Government Pleader. Although he did not directly involve himself in public activities, he was encouraging their promotion with his liberal purse.

At home, Deshpande had ample opportunities to imbibe national spirit himself. He used to read *Indu Prakash*, a nationalist news-paper. He was also attending lectures whenever delivered on national affairs by the celebrities of the day. He was much impressed by Gopalrao Deshpande Indapurkar's plea for support to the swadeshi movement. He had heard that the Kolhapur Darbar wanted to foist criminal cases on Lokmanya Tilak and Agarkar. He had come to know that Vasudeo Balavant Phadke, in his zeal for national freedom, had collected arms. Deshpande felt thrilled while the elders in the family discussed the incidents of the First War of Independence of 1857, which Britain had dubbed as the Sepoy Mutiny. Balasaheb of Nargund, a Chieftain, had raised a revolt against the British rule and paid the extreme penalty for his patriotism which took the life of Colonel Manson, a British officer of the Indian Army. The family members of Nargundkar committed *harakiri* to escape capture. Deshpande had heard *lavanis* (folk songs) extolling the heroism of Nargundkar with patriotic fervour. Likewise, he had heard the heroic protest against the British rule made by Rani Channamma of Kittur, as well as the brave deeds of Sangolli Rayanna. The alien administrators had intended to forfeit the properties of Rayanna and his associates and auction them, but did not proceed to do so as the local public opinion was fiercely hostile to them. Even if they had auctioned those properties, there would probably have been no bidders. Many people were observ-



ing mourning on account of the end of the Peshwa Rule. Deshpande gathered therefrom that the Peshwas were patriotic and had opposed the alien invaders.

With this background of patriotic endeavour, Deshpande attended the Congress session, along with about 30 delegates from Belgaum, among whom were 4 or 5 Muslims. *En route*, the party visited Hampi and on seeing the ruins of the Vijayanagar empire, Deshpande felt depressed but soon a zest for freedom sparkled in his eyes.

The Congress session at Madras was the first attended by Deshpande and he had for a long time vivid recollections of what he saw and heard. Badruddin Tyabji presided over the session, while Sri T. Madhava Rao was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. The barristers Norton, Surendranath Banerjee and Chandavarkar were among the stalwarts who participated prominently in the deliberations. Deshpande felt greatly impressed with the impassioned oration of Surendranath on the Arms Act, which was a reply to Chandavarkar's defence. The patriotic spirit which marked the session inspired Deshpande to work for the country's freedom.

On return to Belgaum, Deshpande closely studied the press reports of the proceedings of the Congress session, which rekindled his spirit of enthusiasm for Congress work.

Deshpande decided to become a vakil for livelihood as the profession would not clash with Congress service; indeed most of the Congress leaders of the time were vakils.

Deshpande attended also the next Congress session at Allahabad. His desire for Congress work gained further

strength. Of course, Deshpande and his family did a little bit of pilgrimage also before returning to Belgaum.

The 1889 Congress session was held at Bombay, and was attended by 1889 delegates. As Charles Bradlaugh from Britain attended the session, it had special importance. As he was an atheist, he refused to take oath in the name of God when elected to the House of Commons. He was not, therefore, allowed to take his seat in the House. Repeatedly he won in the elections and each time he was refused membership of Parliament for the same reason. His reputation as a rebel and liberal-minded reformer had reached the shores of India and he had, therefore, been especially invited to address the Congress session.

The whole province of Bombay played host. Collection of funds was made in all towns and cities. Belgaum also made its contribution. Deshpande played a significant role in mobilising student support for the session. He was the vice-president of the committee which organised the students and arranged their meetings. This experience in organisation stood him in good stead in Congress work later. Vedanekar, a close friend of Deshpande, who had intimate knowledge of Congress affairs, was the local President and spoke eloquently at public meetings. Deshpande visited Hudli also and secured contributions from farmers.

Deshpande attended the Bombay session, although his father could not. He felt inspired on seeing and hearing such great leaders as Phirozeshah Mehta, Dinshaw-Watcha, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Sir William Wedderburn, the great English Judge, presided over the session, and his association truly enhanced the prestige of the organisation.



## II

# Training for Leadership

### 1

DESHPANDE PASSED the matriculation examination in the second attempt. He paid particular attention to the study of English; he had special coaching in the subject. He rejoined the Bhate School for study in the matriculation class, as the standard of teaching English there was considered to be the best.

Rejecting a proposal for the study of Munsiff examination, Deshpande joined the Deccan College at Pune for collegiate education to enter the legal profession as such later. In those days, Deccan College was considered as an institution for students of the affluent class, while Fergusson College was nicknamed as Tin-Pot College, which attracted generally students from poorer sections of the society. The climate of Pune was then more salubrious than it is now and it was preferred to Bombay by students as it provided congenial atmosphere for studies and as the cost of living there was cheaper.

Deshpande's brother-in-law also joined and stayed with him at Pune. Deshpande's grandmother and mother bade a tearful good-bye, when he left Belgaum for Pune. His father also might have felt the pangs of separation but it was not manifested. A clerk and a servant accompanied Deshpande to Pune and it was intended that they should stay there and serve him. Deshpande felt that the facili-

ties in Pune were so satisfactory that their services to him were superfluous and, so, caused their return to Belgaum.

There were six canteens for students. One was exclusively for the Kannada students and its cook, Venkappa, had earned a reputation for excellent food preparations. Several of his friends had joined one or the other of the five Marathi canteens. Deshpande and his brother-in-law did not choose any of them as the attraction of Venkappa's preparations was irresistible.

Deshpande was not keen on studies as he had no ambition to secure high I Division in the examination. He joined tennis and boat clubs. He also joined swimming class but it was given up at his father's objection. Although he was lukewarm towards studies, Deshpande spent quite some time in the reading room daily and used to discuss press reports with his friends, among whom was Krishnarao Anekhindi, a diligent student. At that time there was a controversy going on between Tilak's *Kesari* and Agarkar's *Sudharak* on public affairs. Deshpande agreed generally with the stand of *Sudharak*, while his brother-in-law held a contrary view.

While at Belgaum, Deshpande at one time became a victim of flu and he was given treatment by his family doctor, Dr. Shirgaonkar. His temperature shot up one day, when unfortunately the family doctor was out of town. His father summoned another doctor who was rather inimical to Dr. Shirgaonkar. Deshpande, on that account, refused to take medicine prescribed by him. On returning to Belgaum the family doctor visited Deshpande, examined and treated him back to health.

Deshpande gradually cultivated close rapport with the family doctor who had reformist views. They agreed on several matters. Now and then Dr. Shirgaonkar used to take



food at the Deshpandes. As he was a Saraswat Brahmin, he was not allowed to sit in line with the other members of the family. Deshpande, who resented this discrimination, gave company at times and his father and ladies of the family had to acquiesce.

Deshpande used to exchange views on current affairs with Dr. Shirgaonkar. In respect of Congress affairs, however, they were opposed to each other. Dr. Shirgaonkar held a confirmed view favourable to the British administration of India, which Deshpande did not share.

Deshpande returned to Pune and continued his studies. His brother-in-law fell ill and had to return to Belgaum for treatment.

Deshpande came closer to Anekhindi, who was like-minded. Both of them used to enter into vehement discussion on current political affairs, as projected by *Kesari* and *Sudharak* with other students who did not share their opinion. Quite often, at dinner table, there were loud protests and pleadings, attracting inquisitive crowds, peeping through the windows from outside.

Deshpande had the privilege of meeting Gokhale, Tilak and Agarkar in Pune and discussing with them matters of public importance. He found Gokhale and Agarkar stern and serene, while Tilak appeared to him pungent. If Tilak was less offensive, his friends and admirers in the assembly were not so.

Deshpande often felt that Tilak was wasting his great talent and energy by espousing undeserving causes. He was closely studying the articles in *Kesari* and *Sudharak* on the same issues but was unable to share the former's opinions. In the Kannada club, pro-Tilak students were in appreciable number, and Deshpande and Anekhindi

often indulged in passage of arms with them. These discussions warded off timidity altogether from Deshpande and he would not infrequently argue passionately about his point with opponents. Gradually, this habit became Deshpande's characteristic. Although he later on moved in life closely with Gandhiji, he could not imbibe Gandhiji's gentle persuasiveness. He was closer to Tilak in arguments for a cause.

Both Deshpande and Anekhindi passed the examination. Deshpande, as he had not studied and done well in the examination, evinced no interest to find out the result of his efforts. Two days after the result had been announced, his father congratulated him and only then did he come to know of it.

## 2

That was the time when the Bill relating to the Age of Consent for Marriage, mooted by the Central Government, was under public discussion. Arguments in many parts of the country were vehemently advanced for and against it. A section of the public strongly held the view that no alien government was competent to legislate on social issues of this country. Its leader in Pune was none other than Tilak himself. A mammoth public meeting was organised to attack the measure and Tilak himself addressed it with conviction and passion. Deshpande attended the meeting although he was in favour of the reform. He was taken aback when foul epithets were lavishly employed at the meeting to criticise the stand of the pro-changers. He was, however, certain that Tilak, great and magnanimous as he was, could not be directly responsible for such vituperative language although it was possible that he might have just winked at the outbursts.



Dr. Bhandarkar played a leading role in mobilising public opinion in favour of reform and, a few days later, a meeting was held at the play-ground to declare support therefor. Conservative leaders and their student followers wanted to disrupt the meeting. Tilak, Namjoshi and others were also present. As the meeting was in progress, a few stones and brick-bats were hurled at the dais from outside whereupon Deshpande held an umbrella over Dr. Bhandarkar as a protective shield. The police, who intervened, managed to whisk away Dr. Bhandarkar and leave him at his residence. The police also launched prosecution against some persons but were unsuccessful at court. The debate on the aftermath of the disturbance went on for quite some time in *Kesari*, and other local newspapers, elders' clubs and student unions.

In the midst of this tumult, there was a diversion or a silver lining in the cloud. There were Deccan College Day celebrations in which students and parents alike participated with great enthusiasm. A comedy, *Mrichhakatika*, was staged by students. Deshpande's friend, Katti, played the role of Vasantasena at his instance and his acting was widely appreciated.

Deshpande befriended Mangesharao Telang, also a student. Telang had passed the previous Entrance Examination from Wilson College and joined Deccan College for further studies. Friendship between them grew closer since Anekhindi had left to join public service at Jamkhandi. Their association became still closer when they joined Law College. As Deshpande fell ill, he had to be taken to Belgaum for treatment. He could not, in consequence, study well and failed in the public examination, as expected. His brother-in-law, Bandopant, wanted to resume his collegiate education but could not as his illness continued to harass him. Soon, he passed away,

leaving his young wife and a daughter, Akkootai. In due course, Akkootai got married to Huilgol of Gadag and her son, Dr. Venkatarao Huilgol participated in the freedom struggle and suffered imprisonment thrice.

Deshpande rejoined the college in 1892. He secured special coaching in the subject of mathematics and was able to pass the examination. He joined the B.A. class in 1893 and graduated in the first attempt.

When a decision was taken to start the publication of the College magazine, a question was raised as to the language in which it should be. As Marathi was the mother-tongue of the majority of students, it had naturally to reserve appreciable space for the articles in that language. A question arose whether Kannada articles could also be accepted for publication. This controversy started as there was no spirit of camaraderie between Marathi and Kannada students. Quite often there used to be manifestations of contempt and ridicule amongst them. Sometimes, such interludes ended in harmless loud laughter. Deshpande, enjoying friendship of both Kannada and Marathi students, was able to be at home in both circles. Many Marathi students had indeed taken him to be their kinsman and showered affection on him which was an embarrassment to him especially when he was in the company of Kannada students. Deshpande persuaded Marathi students to publish some Kannada articles in the magazine to demonstrate students unity. He himself had to bear the brunt of its publication. He had to collect articles, edit them and arrange for their print. He had also to undertake the responsibility of correspondence and maintenance of accounts.

Deshpande spent four memorable years of his life in Deccan College and later in life used to reminisce with



great delectation in the company of his close friends.

Among the Indian Professors was Dr. Bhandarkar who was widely respected for his profound scholarship. Karkare and Kathavate also commanded considerable respect from their students. Karkare, who used to teach mathematics, endeared himself to his students.

Lectures were frequently delivered at the College by learned men, on subjects of interest to students. Mahadeo Govind Ranade, Telang and Modak were among those who spoke when Deshpande was a student. Ranade was a well-known scholar in history and economics. Students and teachers used to throng to hear him. Even foreign teachers respected his scholarship. Modak, who had just then retired as Principal of the Elphinstone College, Bombay, chose Pune for his retired life. He was regarded as a staunch social reformer and Deshpande, who was known to entertain reformist views, became a frequent visitor to him. The atmosphere at Modak's home had an aroma of social freedom. Ladies, old and young, used to speak and move freely with friends of the opposite sex. Deshpande, who felt initially embarrassed, gradually attuned himself to the new environment. He also became acquainted with another social reformer, Vamanrao. He attended one of his lectures on Raja Ram Mohan Roy, delivered at the Prarthana Samaj Hall, where the lecturer unfortunately suffered a stroke and had to be removed to Modak's residence for treatment. Deshpande was among those who attended on him and this provided him an opportunity to study closely a reformist family. The reformist tendency even in such a family appeared to him to be no more than skin deep.

Deshpande had soon to pay a price for his reformist zeal. Vamanrao's daughter, on the way to her husband's



residence at Dharwar, camped at Deshpande's residence at Belgaum. Deshpande did whatever he could to demonstrate that his family members were also no less modern socially, but the veil soon tore out. His wife refused to accompany him when he took the visitor out for showing places of interest in Belgaum, and he along with the visitor alone had to go out in a tonga, which provided quite a strange experience to him. Friends and relatives, who saw the rare spectacle, no doubt pulled his legs for their own amusement.

At home, Deshpande endeavoured to introduce a few changes in social habits and customs. The rigidity in the observance of *madi* and *mailige* was slowly disappearing on his part, but this could not influence others to toe his line. His wife refused to learn the three R's as she entertained firmly a notion that it was a taboo for women to get educated. Once, when all the other members of the family were absent, Deshpande prepared bread toast at home in the presence of his wife. After the preparation was over, she cleaned the whole place and got for herself a fresh bath. She advised him sternly, "Please don't do all this at home."

Once, Deshpande along with his wife had to travel by rail. He bought two second class tickets. He took his seat but his wife did not. She was standing throughout the journey. When questioned, she quietly replied, "This bogie belongs to Sahebs. If I sit, it is *mailige* for me."

As a reformer, Deshpande was opposed to child marriage but at home he could not influence his father against it. Later, when he wanted to celebrate the marriage of his own daughters after they came of age, the opposition at home overwhelmed him. Western type of education, he noticed, influenced Indian students to eschew some of the old evil social practices, but they

were quite often unable to do so in their family circles because of strong conservative opposition. They suffered being between the devil and the deep sea.

After graduation in 1893, Deshpande decided to study law to become an Advocate hoping to lead an affluent life. His father had at first intended that he might join government service as a Mamlatedar or some similar officer. He had been banking upon the certificates of loyalty of his ancestors. As Deshpande was firm about his course of life, his father had no option but to acquiesce.

Deshpande could not immediately go to Bombay to join the Law course as his mother fell ill and he had to be at her side. Earlier, he had joined a law course at Deccan College. It was possible to take the examination as an undergraduate. There was no need for strict attendance on the part of students. These facilities were availed of by several students. Some students just paid fee for completing the term. Deshpande was an exception as he was earnest. He passed the examination with distinction. It enabled him to join the second term of LL.B. Degree course straightaway.

After his mother had gained her health in 1896, Deshpande proceeded to Bombay for further study in law. He and his three friends rented a house in Girgaum. He joined the P.Y. Gymkhana for sport. He was more interested in seeing them playing tennis. He was also interested in cricket. Some of his friends were good cricketers playing for his club. There were Parsee and Muslim Gymkhanas and there used to be cricket matches between them. He used to attend them and extensively comment on the players' performance. Once a Bombay team visited Belgaum and Deshpande hosted a dinner to the visitors at his residence. Without distinction of caste,



all the players sat in a row. It was indeed a terrible sight for the family, wedded to old customs.

Deshpande started his studies in right earnest in 1896 at Bombay. He and Anekhindi lived together. Both of them regularly attended the Sunday meetings at Prarthana Samaj. Chandavarkar, Ranade and Bhandarkar, among others, used to participate in the discourses. At one of the meetings, a heated debate took place on widow marriage. Ranade spoke but was accused that he had himself let an opportunity slip to forge such an alliance; he pleaded guilty and brought the proceedings of the meeting to a peaceful conclusion.

Deshpande and his friend later came to Pune for completing their term at Deccan College. They searched for a lodge but in vain. Ultimately they approached Gokhale, Principal of Fergusson College. He permitted them to stay in the College Guest House, and they were taking meals at the Kannada Club. One day, when some students of Deccan College contemptuously referred to Fergusson as Tin-Pot College, the students of the latter college who heard the disparaging remark, loudly protested. Deshpande and his friend, intervening, vehemently condemned the unwarranted attack but a student, who could not understand clearly what was going on, reported to Gokhale that Deshpande and Anekhindi had both attacked the prestige of his college. Gokhale ordered summarily the expulsion of the students complained against. Deshpande and Anekhindi had no option but to go; they desired to take formal leave of Gokhale. They met him and, when asked, explained what had actually happened. Gokhale regretted his error and readily withdrew the expulsion order.

When the academic term ended, plague broke out at



Mandvi, Deshpande and his friend soon came to Pune. Students at Pune feared to take the examination at Bombay and wanted its postponement. They called a meeting in which Deshpande participated and passed a resolution. The University authorities refused to postpone the examination and proceeded in right earnest with preparations therefor. A tent was erected on the sea beach near Marine Lines to serve as the examination hall. On the eve of the examination, the tent was set on fire and destroyed. A day or two later, Deshpande received a letter which stated that what he wanted had been achieved, though differently, and a packet of ashes as proof thereof.

Deshpande took the examination later when it was held, but failed.

The 1895 Congress Session was held at Pune under the presidency of Surendranath Banerjee. At the Congress Venue, for years past, the Social Reform Conference also used to be held. It was expected that, at Pune too both the sessions would be held at the same pandal. However, Tilak and his friends protested as they did not want the continuance of the mix-up. A noted lawyer, Sridhar Vittal Date, threatened to set fire to the Congress pandal, if the Social Reform Conference was allowed to be held there. In view of the tense situation, the Conference assumed inflated importance. Deshpande attended it as a delegate. He attended also the Congress Session but as a visitor although he followed the deliberations closely. Surendranath spoke extempore for about three hours and did not read the printed address, copies of which had earlier been distributed. His powerful patriotic oration captivated the huge assembly. The 'Bengal tiger' roared ferociously at the Britishers; he condemned the alien power unsparingly for its unbridled exploitation of India's rich resources for its exclusive advantage. Lord Brentford

had declared: "We did not conquer India for the benefit of Indians. We conquered India as the outlet for the goods of Great Britain. We conquered India by the sword and by the sword we should hold it."

While at Bombay, Deshpande used to visit frequently the Cosmopolitan Club in Girgaum. Among its members were persons of all castes and classes. They used to mix freely amongst themselves in games and gossip. Several of them, not excluding several of Deshpande's friends used to drink heavily and he was many times a silent spectator to their being led to their residences very late at night in a drunken state.

Deshpande was never tempted to drink although he used to take egg-mixture off and on. Several of his friends frequented Irani tea-shops, but he preferred to go to the Court Canteen. As he admired the English manners, he wore also three pieces of dress for some time.

Deshpande had an urge to render social service. Quite often it manifested in one form or the other throughout his life. When Mangesharao Telang, a friend, suggested that they might together start a periodical for the uplift of the weaker sections of the people in Belgaum, he agreed readily although his professional work was pressing. The periodical, entitled *Dhureena* (The Leader) was started in Kannada to promote social reform. The periodical pleaded that all that was old should not be rejected and all that was new should not be accepted blindly; only that which proved good, whether old or new, should be adopted. The periodical picked up circulation gradually and its copies were in demand in far-off cities like Bombay and Nagpur. In less than a year, the number of subscribers rose to over a thousand. The advertisement revenue was also encouraging.



When plague broke out in epidemic form at Pune, the police and military committed excesses which were criticised unreservedly by *Kesari*. Deshpande wanted that *Dhureena* should send a special representative to Pune for an on-the-spot study. Telang maintained that they should without equivocation support Government measures as they were intended totally to promote public good; he was willing to ignore the alleged police and military atrocities.

Gokhale, who was then in England, had issued a press statement condemning vehemently those atrocities. His statement was strongly criticised by the British Government as being opposed to facts. On his return home, Gokhale sought confirmation of the reports he had earlier received but those who had so reported proved to be untrustworthy. The others, who had some evidence did not come forward to support him; Tilak, it appears, had certain amount of evidence but it was not made available to him. Gokhale, gentleman that he was, tendered an unqualified public apology, which no doubt, lowered his stature considerably as a political leader. Critics were aplenty who raised high their sharp cudgels against him. When a man has fallen, every one hurls stones at him. *Dhureena*, however, supported the stand of Gokhale which received approbation from the leader himself.

In 1897, Tilak was prosecuted for sedition and the country as a whole resented the highhanded British action. Deshpande thought that the harlot's sin was thrown on the saint's head. Telang did not share this extremist view. Deshpande also resented the Judge's interpretation of 'sedition' and in the club and elsewhere the Judge's contention was vehemently condemned. The Judge had opined that the absence of loyalty was sedition. Owing to differences of opinion between Deshpande and



Telang, the *Dhureena* met its end before long.

After Deshpande had taken his *sanad* and started practice at the bar, his father retired to his village for spiritual contemplation. Deshpande rose to the occasion. His self-confidence grew as days rolled by. He came into contact with prominent members of the bar as well as those of the judiciary. Gangadhar Vishnu Limaye of Pune was the First Class Subordinate Judge in Belgaum; he used to chastise the lawyers who did not come prepared with their cases. He would often advise them to consult their own clerks. Deshpande took the cue and never allowed himself to become a victim of the judge's wrath. Deshpande appeared once before an English District Judge, opposing a senior member of the bar, Belvi. Although he was a little nervous at first, he mustered courage as he proceeded with his arguments. When he concluded, he had the genuine satisfaction of having acquitted himself creditably.

Belgaum had also become a victim of the plague epidemic, and residents of the town set up camps away from the city. One of the camps was at the place where the present Thalakwadi extension is situated. When the camp was constructed, the residents named it after Tilak who had then become the symbol of national pride, having incurred the wrath of the British Raj. Later, some residents, Government officials, became panicky which drove them to change the name of the camp as *Thalakwadi* to signify that the camp consisted of eight huts. The name gained currency and is in vogue even today. In 1924, the 39th Congress session was also held at Thalakwadi.

Deshpande practised seriously at the bar between 1897 and 1905. He had a lucrative practice and rose to promi-

nence. He visited mofussil courts also frequently. Especially at Gokak, he had commendable practice. When his father hinted that he might join Government service as Munsiff, his reaction was that there was no need to change the horse as he was doing very well at the bar.

After court work, Deshpande used to visit the club for tennis and chit-chat. At the bar room, he noticed that many members were whiling away their time in useless gossip and that had lowered the prestige of their noble calling. The situation, alas, has not changed anywhere even today. Those, who so spend their time, are presumed to enjoy unenviable practice at the bar. Deshpande developed a contempt for the profession itself which enabled him to evince interest progressively in civic and kindred affairs.

### 3

In 1897, Deshpande entered the civic arena. He felt enthused as his father had been before him a prominent city father. He had actively associated himself with civic elections earlier as a canvasser for his father and friends. In the bar room, a friend suggested to him to contest the ensuing civic elections and surmised that he would, with his undoubted popularity, succeed. Till then the ward, where Deshpande resided, was represented in the Municipal Committee by Vishwambhar Ashtekar, a prominent vakil, and a much respected citizen, for whom Deshpande also had high regard. Ashtekar had a desire to get elected as Vice-President and was, therefore, keen on retaining his seat in the Municipal Committee. When provoked in the bar room, he proclaimed that even if God Brahma contested against him. He would be defeated. Deshpande and his friends, who witnessed this scene resented Ashtekar's arrogance and decided to humble



him. Consultations between them crystallised in favour of Deshpande himself challenging the old timer. His father and other friends too welcomed the proposal. The ward had considerable illiterate voters who were swayed by temptations. Ashtekar feared that their support might get tilted towards Deshpande. As discretion was the better part of valour, he announced withdrawal of his candidature in support of Deshpande to the surprise of many of his supporters. Consequently, Deshpande won the election uncontested.

Deshpande befriended Bhimarao Patil at election work. Patil was a leading member of the local Maratha Community and commanded considerable influence. He was also a terror to his opponents in his ward. In a criminal case, he had been fined and bound for good behaviour. In 1894, on the occasion of the Muharram celebrations, there was a communal riot which resulted in the murder of 3 or 4 Muslims. Communal disturbances on such occasions had earlier occurred at Bombay and other places. Patil was no doubt in Belgaum when the riot broke out there but he swore in private and public that he had no hand in the murder incident. Lord Collin Campbell, bar-at-law appeared for the accused at the sessions trial and all the accused were set at liberty. Patil's stock of prestige rose tremendously high in society and his guidance and support were much sought after. In the Municipal Committee, Deshpande belonged to the group which was unfriendly with the group of which Patil was a prominent member. Their personal friendship was, nonetheless, cordial and on several public issues Deshpande received his unstinted support.

In the Municipal Committee, vested interests had raised their ugly head. Deshpande wanted to clear them out but he was in utter minority. Jackson, the Collector, who



was the ex-officio President, acted in all matters generally as dictated to by the Vice-President, Lallubhai, who was inimical to Deshpande.

Lallubhai was a Vedantin and used to give discourses in his bungalow daily. Deshpande's father was also attending the discourses whenever convenient. At one time, probably in 1899, Lallubhai spent the whole of X'mas holidays with Balakrishna at his estate. Deshpande attended on him. One day, Lallubhai advised Deshpande to co-operate with Bandopant Uchgaonkar, another city father, and he could thereby get elected, if he wanted to be Vice-President. Deshpande, on the contrary, like his friends, had come to the conclusion that Uchagaonkar had not only incurred the displeasure of the municipal employees, particularly the teaching fraternity, but also of the general public.

The day was not far off when Uchagaonkar was humbled. The Chairmanship of the School Committee, which he had coveted, was won by Deshpande in election. Deshpande used, no doubt, his office for the promotion of Swadeshi spirit amongst the teachers who in turn transmitted the same to their wards. He also improved the service conditions of teachers and facilities for teaching. Uchagaonkar, who was groaning under humiliation, charged Deshpande with abusing his office to promote hatred towards the British Raj but his accusation was ignored.

Taking advantage of his unfriendliness towards Deshpande which grew in intensity during 1903-04, Telang set up Moropant as a candidate at the civic elections. Deshpande accepted the challenge by setting up Rangopant Naik against him. Deshpande's father and Dr. Shirgaonkar supported openly the candidature of Moro-

pant. People curiously witnessed at polling stations on the election day father and son working zealously in opposite camps. Both of them went about their work in a spirit of sportsmanship to the delight of the on-lookers. In the election, Moropant was defeated; in the next election also, he fared no better.

Deshpande continued to be a city father till the end of 1914. In that year, the Municipal Committee earned the privilege of electing its president, but the successful candidate had to secure 3/4 majority support. If no such candidate was available, the Government nominated the president. Although Deshpande's group was in majority, it did not have the stipulated strength. As the group was opposed to a Government nominee thrust upon the Municipal Committee, it devised a plan, whereby a nominated Councillor, an Englishman, was elected president with the support of both the groups. Deshpande got elected as the vice-president, and the Committees were captured by the Deshpande's group. The group, thus gave a quietus to vested interests which had prevailed for a long time. Years later, Deshpande regretted that, to spite the Opposition, he was instrumental in foisting an Englishman as the head of the Municipal Committee; if he had compromised with the Opposition, he would not have suffered in the bargain, for it would not have failed to co-operate on *quid pro quo* basis.

Deshpande was *de facto* President of the Municipal Committee, as the elected president virtually abdicated his responsibility in favour of one who was instrumental in his election. He was not even attending Municipal meetings and, in consequence, Deshpande himself used to preside over them. In administrative matters also, the Chief Officer consulted Deshpande and acted strictly on his advice. Deshpande's supremacy was, however, short-



lived, as he had to resign when a case of murder was foisted on him, born of ill-will. In the Municipal Committee, Deshpande learnt, that the Muslim representation had been inflated due to error in the enumeration of voters. Encouraged by official patronage, the Muslim leaders demanded separate electorates. Deshpande supported the demand unwillingly hoping that it would foster Hindu-Muslim unity. When the demand was conceded, he realised the gravity of his error. In later years, when the Congress consistently followed a policy of Muslim appeasement, his grief knew no bounds.

When Japan won the war against Russia in 1905, the people of India rejoiced in the fact that an Eastern power had proved its superior might over its Western counterpart. In India, the nationalist movement got impetus everywhere. In Belgaum too a meeting was held where Telang spoke. As he made some disparaging comments on Tilak's patriotic endeavour, some friends of Deshpande, who were present, protested and goaded Deshpande, to counter the attack. Deshpande, who was also enraged, spoke emotionally for 15 to 20 minutes, which not only nullified the damage attempted by Telang's unwarranted comments but also established his credential as a powerful speaker. Yielding to popular demand, Deshpande had also to speak the next day on the same topic. His eloquent plea for the national political independence, as propounded by Dadabhai Naoroji and others, thrilled the audience which was larger than that of the previous day and he was publicly acknowledged as a leader of the people.

The partition of Bengal led to the boycott of the British goods and the promotion of the *swadeshi* not only in Bengal but also in other parts of the country. In Maharashtra, the movement secured special impetus from



Tilak who used to write and speak vigorously. When Tilak's patriotic outbursts struck sympathetic chords in Deshpande's heart, he was in a dilemma whether he should only join the movement or actively participate thereafter in the nationalist movement. Deshpande decided to consult his well-wishers. Although he was inspired by Tilak's writings and speeches, he chose to consult Gokhale who had not favoured the swadeshi movement less. He felt quite at home with Gokhale. He explained that he had an irresistible urge to render national service. Gokhale appreciated the youngman's patriotic fervour and wished him good-speed, remarking, however, that the phenomenon of youngmen coming forward to serve the country was not very common. When Deshpande said he could even give up the profession for the cause of the country, Gokhale felt elated.

Gokhale enquired of him whether he was willing to join social reform movement or the freedom movement. Deshpande replied that he preferred to work in the political field. Gokhale then asked him if he had met Tilak. When he replied in the negative, Gokhale advised him to seek his counsel also before plunging into action.

Deshpande met Tilak the next day. Tilak was glad at the decision of the young-man to prefer national service to a lucrative professional calling and he urged him to stick to his decision whatever the odds. He also asked Deshpande to consult Gokhale before the plunge. When told he had already met Gokhale and he had advised him to seek Tilak's blessings, the latter just smiled. Although Tilak and Gokhale were uncompromising political opponents, their personal relationship was ever cordial.

The deck was thus cleared for Deshpande's political activity. On return to Belgaum, he attempted to mobi-

lise public support for the movement to annul the partition of Bengal and promote the swadeshi spirit amongst the people. Public meetings had been earlier held in many parts of the country, but no such meeting had till then been held at Belgaum. Deshpande desired to organise a meeting but could not get a convenor who had a standing in public life. Hence, he convened a meeting himself at the Maruthi Temple and addressed it for over two hours. No member of elite class was present but students had thronged in large numbers. What was less than 200 when the meeting commenced, swelled to over one thousand when it concluded.

Deshpande felt gratified at the public response. When demands were made for more of such meetings, he readily obliged. He addressed all of them and a few friends also spoke likewise. Even prominent citizens began to attend. At the bar room, Deshpande received spontaneous approbation from many friends, but a few critics were not altogether wanting. His father felt pleased but advised him to be wary while criticising Government action.

As Deshpande's activities expanded, many people from different walks of life were drawn towards him from time to time. One of the earliest amongst them was Govindrao Yalgi, an humble jeweller at that time. His association, as time passed, grew so close that Deshpande invariably relied upon him for organising meetings, etc. This intimate friendship which began in 1905 lasted till Yalgi died in 1923.

At the height of the movement against the partition of Bengal, in 1905, a Congress session was held at Bombay under the presidentship of Sir Henry Cotton. As an adjunct to it, a Swadeshi Exhibition had been organised.



Goods manufactured in India with British capital and under British management were on show; they were not then considered as foreign; the change in outlook came later when Gandhiji took the nation's leadership. Deshpande could not attend the Congress session, but visited the exhibition and spent five days in going over from shop to shop. On seeing the exhibits and studying their production and marketing, Deshpande got the impression that those goods could very well be manufactured and marketed with Indian capital and talent, and the British participation in any form could be totally eliminated. He also thought that, by popularising the sale of such goods, the swadeshi movement could be spread.

In partnership of two friends, Deshpande opened a shop, styled the Deccan Stores at Bombay. He was himself the salesman for some days. In the beginning, sales were not encouraging and on certain days, he did not earn a rupee. The shop had to be improved with stocks of swadeshi stationery, hair oil, soap, etc.

The sales improved as the swadeshi movement strengthened. Deshpande studied the techniques of whole-sale and retail trade; he got the impression that the producers and their agents had no conception, whatsoever, of the swadeshi movement.

A branch of the Deccan Stores was opened some time later at Belgaum and Deshpande took its charge. Not only did he attend to sales but also used to address public meetings in the city and mofussil towns for popularising the use of swadeshi goods. His critics like Telang carried on a campaign against him that he was doing the swadeshi propaganda for improving the sales at his shop, but such jealous accusations proved futile. At Rang Panchami festival organised for a number of days by Hindus

who had stayed back from participating in the Muharram festivities, consequent on the earlier communal clash, public entertainments used to be held every evening which attracted huge crowds and, as part of them, there used to be regular harangues by Deshpande and friends on the swadeshi movement.

The sales at the Bombay shop improved beyond expectation and the daily turnover exceeded Rs. 1,000/-. A time soon came when the necessity to increase its capital became inevitable. Deshpande and his two partners were unequal and had to sell away their interests. The Belgaum shop also slipped away from their hands. Deshpande had no regrets, as his aim was not to earn personal benefits from the swadeshi movement. If he had continued as a salesman, he could not have grown in stature.



### III

## Encouragement from Tilak

### 1

THE COMMUNAL disturbances of the closing years of the last century in Pune had so marred the Hindu-Muslim unity that Hindus dissociated themselves with the Muharram and other Muslim festivities and, in turn, organised the public observance annually of the Ganesha and Shivaji festivals with gaiety and arranged entertainments and enlightenment. In addition to music, dance and drama, eloquent speeches on national themes to rouse patriotism of the people used to be delivered. Tilak played a leading role in organising the Ganesha festival. Bombay and other cities of Maharashtra soon emulated Pune.

Belgaum did not lag behind. In 1906, when the celebrations started, Deshpande, who had personally witnessed the Pune riots and their aftermath, very naturally associated himself with the new trends. The move, however, had come from the business community of Raviwarpet. When they approached Deshpande via Govindrao Yalgi, his close associate, the response from him was spontaneous as his objective was to wrest every opportunity to promote the national cause. It was no difficult task for the organisers to mobilise a fund of about Rs. 2,000/-. The people's fervour soon spread to other parts of the city and in several wards, the celebrations were held separately with local support and participation. Deshpande was in demand everywhere and he readily obliged.

The popular enthusiasm also concretised to get Tilak from Pune. Deshpande was a bit cold as he had learnt to his distress that Tilak had played his role in reducing the Hindu participation in the Muharram celebrations, but he had to change his attitude at the persistent demand of the local leaders. Deshpande sent a telegram to Tilak and the reply was instant that he and his friends might meet him the very next day. The deputation immediately sped to Pune. When it met, Tilak asked Deshpande whether he had brought with him the papers. On seeing Deshpande confounded, Tilak pointed out that, as the telegram had mentioned "Deshpande vakil", he concluded that they had come for legal consultations. Deshpande, regaining his composure, explained the purpose of his visit and Tilak readily accepted the invitation. Deshpande's stature rose so high in the estimate of his friends at Belgaum that they refused to believe when he insisted that Tilak's response was due to his strong urge to seize every opportunity to serve the nation. A reception committee was soon formed with Natu, a prominent citizen, as the Chairman and Deshpande was its Secretary. Even those prominent citizens, who were opposed to Tilak's politics, were not less enthusiastic to lend their support. Demands came in large numbers from different parts of the city as well as from neighbouring towns for arranging Tilak's visit to their places. As the people everywhere had supported unstintedly the public activities of Deshpande, it became very difficult for him to displease any section of them. He tactfully managed the situation.

Tilak's first ever formal visit to Belgaum in 1906 left an indelible impression on the public life of that city. His public speeches and private discussions gave a great fillip to the swadeshi movement. Earlier, he had paid brief visits twice but they were of no consequence.



Belgaum, Dharwar, Bijapur and Karwar (Uttara Kannada) districts formed the Kannada or Karnataka region of the then Bombay Presidency which included most of the parts of the present Maharashtra and Gujarat States. Situated in the southern-most area of that large presidency, it did not receive much attention and was left largely at the mercy of the British Administration. Political awakening there was so negligible that it was left to patriots like Deshpande and Srinivasa Rao Koujalgi of Bijapur to do the spade work. They also could not keep constant touch with every nook and corner of the region with the result that Karwar or North Kanara was the last to get politically awakened.

After the Nagpur Session in 1920, the Congress accepted the principle of linguistic provinces. Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee came into existence and the Kannadigas of the region began to realise that they could erelong shape and project their own personality on the Indian political horizon. Deshpande was the first President of Karnataka Congress Committee. The political aspirations of Kannadigas received a stimulus in 1924 when the Congress Session was held in Belgaum. It was the only Congress Session over which Gandhiji ever presided. Deshpande was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. The 1930-32 Civil Disobedience Movement, launched by the Congress under the unique leadership of Gandhiji, infused tremendous political awakening among the people inasmuch as several towns and villages of the region became hot beds of non-violent revolutionary activities including the mass-breach of the Salt Law in 1930.

The situation in 1906, however, was truly dismal. Tilak's visit brought Deshpande very close to the national leader. Deshpande had by then shed all his misgivings

about him and his association with Tilak became progressively closer and closer. Tilak came to repose so much confidence in Deshpande that the latter was looked upon as one of the very few closest associates of the former.

Tilak was ever devastating in dealing with his political opponents, notwithstanding his personal cordial relations with them, but his motives were honest, as they had all sprouted from his innate robust patriotism and love of *Swaraj*.

On the appointed day, Tilak arrived in Belgaum for the fulfilment of his scheduled programme. He came direct from Nasik, where also he had attended a programme of spreading the message of the Nation First. The continuous heavy down-pour of the previous 3-4 days suddenly stopped and under the clear sky the programme of meetings was gone through.

On arrival, Tilak was accorded a rousing reception and taken round in a procession. Thousands of people, lined up on either side of the procession route, cheered the leader as he passed them. The procession roused popular enthusiasm. It was the first ever procession of a political leader in Belgaum and it also drew a huge crowd from neighbouring villages. The arrangements for the procession were ably managed by Govindrao Yalgi and Tilak had a word of unalloyed praise for him. He told Deshpande that wherever he went he observed unbounded youth enthusiasm but stressed that it should be channelised properly.

The first engagement was a public speech at Raviwarpet Chowk. Although a shamiana had been erected, the crowds had vastly over-flowed it. It was abandoned and the meeting took place under the open sky. No sooner did Tilak rise to make a few remarks by way of thanks-



giving than a drizzle started which at once provoked the umbrellas everywhere in the audience to get unfolded. Deshpande got so wild that he stood up on the dais and shouted at the audience that all umbrellas should forthwith be folded even if they were to get drenched in rain. All umbrellas except one were soon folded; that one was of Telang. As Deshpande noticed and smiled, Telang could no more hold it open. Fortunately, the sky soon got cleared of the dark clouds.

Tilak, like a hungry lion, roared for nation's freedom for two hours. As he proceeded, his pristine patriotic outpourings stirred every heart in the audience.

Tilak, who started his public life as Gokhale, soon lost faith in the British rulers. He wrote in *Kesari* in January 1897: "For the last 12 years, we have been shouting hoarse, desiring that the Government should hear us. But, our shouting has no more affected the Government than the sound of a gnat. Let us now try to force our grievances into their ears by strong constitutional means." He advocated the four-fold programme of the Congress, namely, Swaraj, Swadeshi, National Education and Boycott. He asserted that Swaraj was the birth-right of everyone every-where. "It lay not in supplication but in self-assertion, not in submission but in direct action." He called upon his countrymen to fight for their political rights.

He explained how the nation had been bled white by the British imperialism, with such fervour, that the whole of the audience not excluding the huge multitude of villagers present, repeatedly cheered him.

Tilak spoke in the same tenor at nearby Shahapur and Anagol also. He was given a farewell dinner to which leading members of the elite had been invited. One of

those present put a mischievous question to Tilak as to what he would do if freedom came. Ready was the answer : "I would comment then, as now, fearlessly, on the acts of omission and commission of the then government in order to bring about improvement in administration for the good of the people."

As Tilak was a Chitpavan Brahmin, some Saraswat Brahmins of Belgaum not excluding Telang attempted to organise a boycott but received no support. A Saraswat Brahmin had the audacity to ask Tilak whether he would dine with those of his caste. Tilak did not hesitate even for a moment to reply in the affirmative. He had no objection if he was served the food to which he was accustomed. Even Panchadravida Brahmins, he insisted, were not to be discriminated against.

The last of his Belgaum engagements was a reception from the Jain Community. In reply to felicitations, Tilak stressed that the Vedic religion was the mother of all religions in India.

After Tilak had left Belgaum at the conclusion of a three-day hectic activity, Deshpande's stock of prestige in public life grew tremendously. Jealous as he was, Telang carried a tirade in his journal, *Chikitsaka*, against Deshpande misreporting deliberately many of his speeches. These reports produced no ill-effect in the public mind and the Administration was not also taken in. Deshpande rode merrily on his growing public prestige.

Deshpande visited many mofussil towns and villages to rouse political awakening amongst the people. With the active assistance of Sakharam Pant Kulkarni, Vakil of Chikodi and Narayana Rao Joshi of Athani, a vigorous campaign was launched. Dasara was transformed into a national festival every-where. Natu, Chatre, Bhate,



Belvi, Govindrao Yalgi, Hanumanthrao Deshpande, Ladd and Bhimarao Patil continued to take active interest in the activities which Deshpande was carrying on. The net result was that Deshpande was looked upon as the right-hand of Tilak and that Belgaum was considered as Tilak-District. The tempo of popular enthusiasm grew enormously year after year and paved the way for holding the Bombay Provincial political conference in 1916 and the Congress Session in 1924 at Belgaum.

Deshpande was, however, distressed to notice jealousy and parochialism even among the closest of his associates. He was himself accused of selfishness. What he noticed in Belgaum was insignificant when compared to the lot of leaders in Bombay, Nagpur and elsewhere. He felt consoled as even taller leaders had not been spared. That is the price the public workers had to pay. Unmindful of the wickedness of hostile elements, Deshpande continued his nationalist work with redoubled zeal. The lofty cause itself endowed him with the requisite strength and courage.

## 2

Tilak had been invited to speak at the Pandharpur Car Festival. Deshpande had also been invited. He proceeded to Pune and accompanied Tilak to Pandharpur along with other nationalist stalwarts, Chintamanrao Vaidya, Nanasaheb Deshmukh, Vasu Joshi and Kaka Patil. Deshpande was benefited by their company.

Tilak addressed the people at the theatre and at the sandy maidan. Chintamanrao presided over the theatre meeting while Vishnubuo Jog presided over the maidan meeting. At the first meeting Tilak warned that the *Vithal bhajan* by itself would not usher in national eman-

cipation and the people had to work for it with dedication. When the pilgrims in the audience sent a murmur of dissent, the chairman had tactfully to pacify them by explaining what Tilak had really meant, that political action was necessary.

After the public engagements had ended, Tilak in a private heart-to-heart talk with the local leaders reposed confidence in them for future work. They also frankly exchanged their views with Tilak, which cleared the cloud from their mental horizon.

A few days later on the invitation of Ganpatrao Kirloskar, Tilak, accompanied by Shivaram Pant Paranjpe visited Gurlhosur, a town on the banks of the Malaprabha river in Saundatti taluka of Belgaum District, 40 kilometres from Dharwar and 88 kilometres from Belgaum. He participated in Chidambareswara festival, organised on a large-scale under the guidance of a sanyasin, Bote Swami. In the previous year, 1905, Deshpande had participated in it and addressed a public meeting.

Deshpande and his co-workers had gone ahead by 3-4 days to Gurlhosur to check up the arrangements for Tilak's visit.

Tilak visited Dharwar *en route* where he addressed a largely attended public meeting. On the way to Gurlhosur, he spoke at several road-side meetings. Thousands of people had crowded at many villages to see the leader, and he gave them the message of Swaraj.

Before his departure for Pune, Tilak enquired of Deshpande whether he desired to work in Maharashtra or Karnataka. When Deshpande replied that he desired to work in Karnataka, where there was a dearth of workers, Tilak advised him to identify himself with the common



people of the region, the Lingayats, and to familiarise himself with their religion, tradition and culture and speak to them in their mother-tongue Kannada. Although all religions were fundamentally the same, people differentiated between one and the other and they were divided on the basis of caste and community. The barrier had to be broken to forge identity of national interest. If he spoke in their language with a familiarity of their interests, people would accept him as one of their own and his task would thereby become easy to perform. Deshpande felt greatly indebted to Tilak for this paternal advice; it stood him in good stead when, in later years, he intensified nationalist movement in the region.

The language issue is sensitive and highly sentimental for any people anywhere. The public workers have to be cautious in their approach to people, especially of other regions. It was not without significance that Tilak confessed to the Gurlhosur audience that the Marathi-speaking people of the region were only tenants. India being a land of multi-languages, he desired that public workers should be familiar with as many of them as they could, at least the language of their neighbour, whom they frequented. Gandhiji, who came on the political scene after him, gave no different advice to his followers.

Bapu Gokhale who was a powerful chieftain in the last days of the Peshwa Administration had his master in Chidambar Dixit at Gurlhosur. Dixit had his residence in the nearby village of Bodhi. Tilak visited Bodhi to collect available historical documents.

Tilak visited Bailhongal, a prominent cotton market. He was presented with a public address. At his instance, an address was also presented to Paranjpe as discrimina-

tion would have been an act of discourtesy. Tilak spoke in Marathi and when he came to know that audience had not followed his speech, he coaxed Deshpande to speak in Kannada. "You may speak whatever you want, but you must speak in Kannada," Tilak insisted. Deshpande had never delivered any speech in public in Kannada and was obviously a little nervous. Deshpande explained in Kannada what Tilak had said, spiced with his own liberal commentary. Deshpande, later, became a very eloquent Kannada speaker. He was an orator in both languages.

While at Bailhongal, Tilak read a press report about the outrage on a poor Punjabi woman's modesty by an Anglo-Indian Officer. He felt touched to the quick. He could not at all sleep the whole night and the next day that was the main topic of his conversation with Deshpande and other associates. Deshpande was enthralled to find how Tilak's heart throbbed even for an unknown helpless woman in far-away Punjab, and thought that type of kinship had to be developed by public workers if they were ever to be worthy of their salt.

Tilak visited Murgod which was a reputed centre for manufacturing textile dyes. He enquired about the possibility of improving the industry. He met the Collector who was camping. For over an hour they spoke but not a word on the political situation. The Collector had copies of Tilak's works, *Orion* and *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, on his table and the conversation centred on them. While returning from the visit, Tilak had a word of admiration for the Collector's tact and courtesy.

After arrival at Belgaum, Tilak spoke on the need for national education to different audiences.

Deshpande started a study circle in Belgaum to incul-



cate a spirit of patriotism amongst the students. Over 100 students enrolled themselves and he spoke on Mazzini of Italy and other great leaders of men. These students before long imbibed the spirit of nationalism and were ready at hand in organising public meetings, etc.

Deshpande decided to organise Shivaji Jayanti in Belgaum as in Pune. At first the celebration was started with slender resources at the private compound of Govind-rao Yalgi, but later, it assumed the proportions of a public festival. Even today, it is being celebrated as a public festival with patriotic fervour.

There was a serious proposal from Bengali leaders that Tilak should be elected president of the 1906 Calcutta Congress Session in recognition of his vehement support for the annulment of the partition of their province. Outside Bengal, only in Maharashtra, the movement had been carried on vigorously for which Tilak was solely responsible. The moderate elements of the Congress were apprehensive of Tilak's extremist political posture; they feared that their hitherto-maintained dominance over the organisation might also meet its Waterloo. They were not prepared to surrender and suggested, therefore, again Dadabhoy Naoroji, the Grand Old Man, who was the undisputed and universally respected leader of India, for the presidentship. Tilak's supporters had but to acquiesce.

The Congress session assumed special importance as it was held at the heart of the revolutionary movement which was on. Aurobindo Ghosh, Bepin Chandra Pal, Ashwini Kumar Datta and several stalwarts participated in it. Aurobindo lamented that Indians had been reduced to the condition of sheep and calves; and while the ordinary man devoted his energies to money-making,

the thoughtful man spent his time in admiring and imitating Shelley and Swinburne. The Congress Session held in 1905 at Varanasi, which was presided over by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, had adopted a resolution to boycott foreign goods; it had been interpreted to mean British goods although the extremists held the contrary view.

Tilak attended the Calcutta Session. Deshpande was also present. A considerable number of delegates had gone there from Belgaum. In the Congress Camp, delegates of different schools of political posture had been huddled together and there used to be frequent heated discussion amongst them in defence of their particular different stand-point.

At the session, Krishnaswami Aiyar of Madras made an eloquent speech which envied especially the Maharashtrian delegates. Deshpande, having sensed the gloom in the camp, requested Tilak to come to their rescue. Tilak readily obliged, cutting short his discussion elsewhere with C.R. Das. Tilak's half an hour speech expectedly electrified the political atmosphere at the session. "Non-cooperate with the Government," he advised and added: "the Government would cease to exist the very day the people withdrew their co-operation from it."

Moderates wanted to dominate but were repulsed by the other delegates, with the result the resolutions passed were all to the liking of the extremists. Dadabhoy himself made an eloquent plea for Swaraj in his presidential address which set the right tone for the proceedings that followed. He cited Macaulay who said, "We have owed to agitation a long series of beneficent reforms which would have been effected in no other way... The truth is that agitation is inseparable from popular government."



He asked the people to agitate. "Agitate means inform. Inform the Indian people what their rights are and why and how they should obtain them, and inform the British people of the rights of the Indian people and why they should grant them."

To the chagrin of the Moderates, the Congress called for a four-pronged drive of Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education. It demanded that the system of Government obtaining in the self-governing British colonies should be extended to India.

Deshpande played an active role in the Congress deliberations unlike his passive observer role at the previous sessions. He was wholly in agreement with Tilak's tenets of the new Nationalist party, which were sought to usher in quickly the political independence of India, and believed that they smoothened the course for the emergence, later, of Gandhiji on the political scene of India with his non-violent revolutionary programmes.

Deshpande's father, Balakrishna, was not an extremist as he had been brought up in the old tradition of submission and suffering. He did not want his son to incur the displeasure of the Government. His aspiration was that his son should become an eminent advocate and amass wealth. But, Deshpande tread a new path of agitation and there was no hope of retracing his steps. Balakrishna consulted Tilak who, on examination of the family circumstances, advised, contrary to his expectation, that his son could fully engage himself in national work and said, "The days of part-time service are long past and we need today persons who could dedicate themselves unreservedly for national endeavour." Tilak's reaction spurred Deshpande to vigorous action. Balakrishna, however, advised his son, out of affection to be cautious. He

stood by him so long as he was alive and looked after all the domestic affairs himself.

### 3

To intensify the freedom movement, Deshpande started improving his mass contact. He had hitherto secured support from student and educated classes. With the active assistance of Govindrao Yalgi, he advocated the involvement of the people belonging to Backward Classes in the Shivaji, Ganapati and Dasara festivals. Competitions in sports, physical culture and wrestling matches formed a regular feature of these festivities. Deshpande had no time to visit the club or the bar room although he had not abandoned legal practice. His time was spent daily in meeting people of every hue, discussing with them national programmes and executing them with their support. Yalgi's enthusiasm was unsurpassed; he would bring daily different groups of people for discussion and programme of political work and enthuse Deshpande to involve himself in it. Deshpande used to exchange his views freely with friends and chalk out programmes of work suited to them.

Following the example of picketing liquor shops in Pune under the leadership of Tilak in 1907, Deshpande launched similar programme of action in Belgaum. There were six liquor shops in the city and cantonment. Deshpandee, Yalgi, Natu, Hanumanthrao Dshpande and others with a volunteer corps launched picketing of them between 6 and 9 p.m. daily. They also organised public meetings at different wards where the wage-earners and the poor lived and carried the message also from door to door. Patil and Ladd, who were till then given to drinking, gave it up and whole-heartedly supported the agitation. Most of the poor people including Uppars, Badigars,



Kammars and Weavers, gave up the habit of drink; they were influenced to do so by their women-folk too within a few days, the drink-habit had largely disappeared from Belgaum inasmuch as the excise contractor felt the pinch and urged for government intervention. The District Magistrate sent word to Yalgi and advised him to give up the programme. He told him that the labourers who worked hard daily needed a pick-up and the Government had also made liquors costly. Yalgi explained that they were just carrying on a programme of persuasion and there was no cause for the Administration to apprehend the breakdown of law and order.

In Pune, the official machinery went into action. Picketers were prosecuted and fined. Tilak collected funds and enabled the accused to pay fines. The fines so paid ran into thousands of rupees. The Belgaum officialdom followed suit. An order under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure was issued prohibiting the picketing of liquor shops. Volunteers violated the order and courted arrest. They were fined. Deshpande and friends conferred with the accused whereupon the accused volunteers preferred to suffer jail-life to paying fine; Yalgi had also gone to jail for not paying fine. This action roused public resentment against the Administration, which incidentally stimulated prohibition work. As days rolled by, fines alone were imposed and they were not heavy. The tempo of agitation had gone up very high, when unfortunately, a miscreant attempted to set fire to a liquor shop and some others assaulted a few persons who attempted to purchase liquor. These violent acts were enough to discredit the agitation.

However, the jail-going volunteers secured unqualified praise from those who at first ridiculed the agita-

tion. Tilak wrote a letter of admiration to Deshpande; the *Kesari* also wrote an article of congratulation.

The swadeshi movement had gained momentum but it reached its climax only in 1920 when Gandhiji along with the Non-violent Non-cooperation movement launched the *khadi* programme. Since then, *khadi* work is going on even to this day at several centres in Belgaum district and elsewhere in Karnataka.

The 1907 Congress Session was scheduled to be held at Nagpur; the decision had been taken at the Calcutta session of 1906. The Moderate group, which had suffered a set-back to its prestige at Calcutta, wanted to regain control over the Congress affairs. It feared total eclipse if the next Congress session were allowed to be held at Nagpur, where Tilak's supporters were in clear majority. There was every possibility of Tilak being chosen to preside over the session, which Moderates wanted to defeat at any cost. The moderate leaders, after good deal of machination managed to shift the venue to Surat which was the pocket-bureau of Pherozeshah Mehta and to invite Rash Bihari Ghosh, the Calcutta Lawyer, to preside. Lala Lajpat Rai, who had been nominated for the presidency by the Extremist group, quietly withdrew on advice from Gokhale.

Nevertheless, the Extremists—Nationalists—decided to try their strength. Deshpande went to Surat with a strong contingent of delegates from Karnataka to lend support to Tilak, who had also come with full strength; among his able supporters were Nanasaheb Deshmukh, Babasaheb Pendrey and Dadasaheb Khaparde. The Nationalist strength at the session was reckoned at over 800, which was by no means insignificant.

When it came to light that the Moderate group desired



to tone down the Calcutta resolution on Swaraj, the Nationalist group felt a shock and decided to avert the catastrophe. Tilak held a series of discussions with Gokhale and other Moderate leaders to arrive at a consensus. When the discussions proved futile, Tilak decided to move a resolution himself on behalf of the Nationalists, at the session soon after the Chairman of the Reception Committee had read his address. Deshpande, who had apprehended an outbreak of violence as goonda elements had been hired by the Moderate to prevent the Nationalists to have their say and way, counselled to Tilak to entrust the job to a person of his stature. Tilak rejected the suggestion as he wanted himself to bear full responsibility for the Nationalist action.

Feelings in both camps had been totally estranged and the venue was surcharged with strong emotion to humble the opponents. At the inaugural session, there was a bedlam. When Tilak wanted to speak, chappals were hurled at him. He was not allowed to speak and the session came to an end abruptly. It was the briefest session ever held.

Soon after this episode, Tilak returned to his lodge, followed by supporters. He held consultations and counselled patience to his followers. Lala Lajpat Rai visited him to confess his ignorance of the Moderates' Conspiracy. Deshpande firmly held the view that if the Moderate leadership had behaved with circumspection and grasped the hand of friendship proffered by the Nationalist leadership, the Surat fiasco would not at all have happened.

Baptista, bar-at-law of Bombay, was prominent among those who defended Tilak's Surat stand. Deshpande's friendship with him which started then lasted till the

latter died in 1920. Whenever he visited Bombay, Deshpande regularly called on Baptista and conferred with him on current affairs untiringly.

When two English ladies were killed in a bomb explosion at Muzaffarpur in Bihar State, articles on the manufacture of bomb appeared in *Kesari*. A few days later, Tilak was prosecuted for sedition, on account of *Kesari* articles.

In order to promote nationalism, Tilak had thought of starting a Marathi daily newspaper *Rashtramat* from Bombay and had made arrangements therefor. Deshpande, who was in Bombay during the trial, was to take interest in the running of the newspaper, which he did.

Deshpande used to be present daily in the court to witness the proceedings of the Tilak case. He felt that he was blessed to have that opportunity. He was greatly impressed with Tilak's demeanour. Tilak looked every inch a very great patriot. When the jury returned a verdict of guilty, Tilak rose to his full stature, when he, without faltering, declared: "In spite of the verdict of the Jury, I maintain that I am innocent. There are higher powers to govern the destiny of man and the cause I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free." It stunned those who had accused him and heartened all others who had crowded the court-hall. His equanimity of temper evoked admiration from every friend and foe alike. To Deshpande, Tilak appeared like a courageous saint unmindful of the savage sentence of six years of jail-life. As soon as Tilak was taken away, patriots who witnessed the scene broke into uncontrollable tears. Deshpande could not control the flood from his eyes for a long time.



Deshpande stayed on at Bombay for 15-20 days consulting friends on the future programme of work.

So long as Tilak was in prison, nationalist activity everywhere was at its lowest ebb and nationalist elements had also dissociated themselves with Congress work. Congress sessions, which were held in his absence, proved insignificant as the Moderate group, which had dominated it, had failed to feel the pulse of the public.

## IV

### Revolutionary Zeal

NO SOONER did Deshpande return to Belgaum than came an s.o.s. from *Rashtrammat* of Bombay. Due to financial difficulties, the newspaper, which at one time was quite prosperous, was sinking. Damle, the editor, had deserted his post. Deshpande conferred with his father who agreed to give financial assistance as he wanted his son to engage himself in a vocation. Deshpande went to Bombay. He managed to shift the press from Batawadi to Girgaum and settled down there to sort out the affairs of the press and the paper. He secured the part-time assistance of Soman who was the editor of *Kal* of Pune. He appointed Apte from Yeotmal to edit the paper. He enlisted the cooperation of some selfless workers also. They toiled like members of one family on minimum remunerations and worked hard to forge *Rashtrammat* as a powerful instrument to propagate national consciousness amongst the people of every caste, creed and community.

Encouraged by the success of the Marathi edition, a Gujarati edition was started with Swami Anand as its editor to promote political awakening amongst the Gujarati people. Dr. Paranjpe went out of his way to help the paper; he sold a piece of his agricultural land to finance the venture and he was humble enough not to tell anybody of what he had done.

When engaged in *Rashtrammat* work, Deshpande attracted several young and energetic persons to render



national service. Amongst them was Kakasaheb Kalelkar. He gave up his legal studies and joined Deshpande to work for *Rashtramata*. As many patriotic youngsters had centered round the newspaper, it was looked upon as a 'National Home'.

Soon, the alien Government decided to take cudgels against the popular paper for its fearless propaganda of patriotism. A security deposit of Rs. 2,000 was demanded when paper's guardians proved unequal to it.

Deshpande decided to close down the business; he sold away the movables to pay salaries to its employees and clear other dues. The premises were also vacated. He regretted the set-back but he had no option. He consoled himself by the thought that tools could be forged when necessary for a cause and no cause would suffer for want of them. That advice had been tendered to him by Tilak himself. Later, Gandhiji also expressed the same opinion to him. In 1921, when the Nagpur Congress session launched non-cooperation movement, Deshpande helped to start another daily newspaper, *Lokmanya* to give a filip to it.

Deshpande's unbounded zeal for national freedom led him for a while into the violent revolutionary camp which had declared: "Independence is our objective and violence is our tool." He had misgivings about the success of any sporadic violent action because weapons in possession of revolutionaries were all quite obsolete. He had also firmly believed that the Britishers would ruthlessly crush any violent action. He did not believe that such violent acts would speed up the dawn of national freedom.

Nonetheless, he was swept away by their patriotic fervour. He had come to know of the revolutionary gang of Nasik and wanted to confer with them. Accompanied by

Kaka Patil, he visited Nasik. Both of them met Babasaheb Khare. After discussion, Khare administered to them the pledge to fight for the country's liberation. They met Babasaheb Deshpande who also took the pledge. All of them decided to spread the message of freedom wherever they could and be ever ready to fight.

One day at Belgaum, Deshpande received a visitor, Vasudeo Rao Kulkarni. He had brought a letter of introduction from Tilak. Kulkarni wanted to settle down at Belgaum as a vakil. He appeared to be a close associate of Tilak. He told Deshpande that Gokhale was responsible for the long-term imprisonment of Tilak. He said that Gokhale had advised the Governor of Bombay to prosecute Tilak and award him a heavy punishment. Deshpande could not believe him as his respect for Gokhale was unshakable and decided to keep away from Kulkarni altogether. Yet, he noticed that an organisation styled as *Sanmitra Samaj* had sprung up at Pune and it was carrying on a virulent campaign against Gokhale. Gokhale filed a case but did not pursue it.

A revolutionary from Nasik, Anna Karve, met Deshpande at Belgaum and declared that his patience was getting exhausted at the political stalemate which had enveloped the country. Some event would soon take place to stir up the political atmosphere, he hinted and left. A few days later, it was reported that Jackson, Collector of Nasik, had been murdered and Karve was among those arrested. Deshpande felt greatly hurt as he had known Jackson personally as a perfect gentleman.

The police went into swift action with full force and took into custody several persons including Bhate, Khare and Patankar for alleged political conspiracy. The accus-



ed were tried at the Peshwawada at Nasik where they had been kept in custody.

Deshpande was also summoned to appear before the Deputy Inspector General of Police at Pune. He was questioned closely but he was firm in his replies. On his attention being drawn to the attempt of throwing a bomb at Lord Minto, the then Viceroy, Deshpande affirmed unequivocally his opposition to the cult of the bomb. He asserted that terrorist methods did more harm to the cause of national freedom than promoting it.

While Deshpande was out easily from the Jackson murder case, he could not have similar relief against the machinations of the Kolhapur Darbar. He got entangled in and suffered from them for over two years.

The Kolhapur police attempted to implicate Deshpande for giving wide publicity in *Rashtramat* to reports against the Darbar in a bomb case. A person came to him and demanded the surrender of a brass-screw vessel containing a bomb alleging that it was in his possession. Deshpande, who was absolutely unconcerned, refuted the accusation and scared him away. However, his residence as well as those of Govindrao Yalgi, Hanumanthrao Deshpande and Shamrao Kalakundri were searched. Nothing incriminating was found at Deshpande's residence. Two letters, which were addressed to Deshpande, relating to *nellis* (a fruit) and potatoes, were seized, mistaking the reference to bombs.

The Kolhapur police launched a case against Ganapatrao Modak who was working for *Rashtramat*, implicating him in alleged attempt to murder Col. Fraser, the Political Agent at Kolhapur. He was arrested at the Kolhapur railway station which was a British territory but the British authorities took no notice of it. The

police strove hard to gather evidence to implicate Deshpande also, but in vain.

The Maharaja of Kolhapur exerted himself to incriminate Deshpande. He engaged a chemist in the Forest Department, Saligram, for it. It was arranged that Saligram should deliver a book on bombs to Deshpande and the latter's residence should be searched for the confiscation of that book. Deshpande got scent of this conspiracy and reported it to the local police in time.

Saligram arrived at Belgaum as scheduled. He came to know that his movements were being watched. Immediately, he dispatched the book to the Maharaja of Kolhapur. When the police came to know of Saligram's action, they sent a telegram to the Postmaster at Kolhapur to seize the book. As the book had been addressed to the Maharaja, the British Administration took serious notice of it. The Deputy Inspector-General of Police at Pune himself came down to Belgaum for investigation. He interrogated Deshpande but could not succeed in implicating him.

Thus, every attempt of the Kolhapur Darbar to hook Deshpande ended in vain. Deshpande rightly observed that a mountain was dug for a mouse.

Deshpande's political activities were sought to be curbed by withdrawing his *inam* rights. On the recommendation of the Collector of Belgaum, action was taken. On the eve of his transfer, however, the Collector owned his folly and recommended restoration of the *inams*. The Collector, who succeeded, attempted to extract an undertaking of loyalty to the British Throne from Deshpande but failed. Deshpande firmly told him that his life-mission was to work for the liberation of his motherland.



After Tilak's removal in 1908 to Mandalay in Burma, there was political lull in the country. The followers of Tilak felt forlorn as they did not want to compromise and join hands with the Moderates of the Congress.

Deshpande thought of some business. Accompanied by Govindrao Yalgi, he visited Bombay to study the prospects. Attracted by banking business, he joined a firm as its partner. He started functioning as its representative, after investing a sum of Rs. 5,000 as security deposit, apart from agreeing to purchase shares. Branches of the firm were opened at Belgaum and Bijapur.

Under pressure, Deshpande and his three associates signed a blank form for the purchase of shares. Within a few days, he and his friends were in trouble. The sponsor gave notice demanding payment of the share amount. Deshpande and his friends, realising the error they had unwittingly committed, sought for an amicable settlement. After many manipulations they were freed from the mess. In this crisis as in others, Govindrao Yalgi stood by Deshpande.

When Deshpande felt despondent that he was not useful to the family, his father consoled him by saying that he was serving the nation which was more worthwhile. Balakrishna felt truly proud when he was recognised and respected as the father of Deshpande. Balakrishna died in October 1912 when his mother was still alive. After his father's death, Deshpande stayed for some time at his native village, Hudli, and attended to domestic affairs.

Deshpande, though innocent, had to stand trial in a murder case. His friend, Hari Govind Kalakundrikar, was a well-known cloth merchant; he had also landed property. He was recognised in society as one belonging to the affluent class. His wife, Kamalabai, was the sister

of Hanumanthrao Deshpande. Hari became the master of the house when his elder brother died. Instead of taking full control himself of the domestic affairs. Hari depended heavily on the clerk Shankar and took to a licentious life. Shankar took full advantage of Hari's irresponsibility and indifference. Hari's mother frowned and desired her brother Amrut to take over. Amrut also desired to do so which naturally irritated Shankar.

Suddenly, one day, Shankar disappeared from the scene. The police received a complaint of suspected murder. The complaint alleged that Amrut had murdered Shankar as he had illicit intimacy with Kamalabai. Police Inspector Jaffer Imam, who was camping at Gujanal, a village two miles from Hudli, to arrest a Beda dacoit gang headed by one Shiva, which was allegedly engaged in robbery, burglary, etc. in the region, took up the investigation. He arrested three Beda labourers who were in the employ of Amrut. Two of the arrested persons were threatened and they made statements before a Magistrate confessing that the three arrested persons, Amrut and another murdered Shankar, burned his body and buried his bones. To strengthen the case, the police took into custody Hari also.

Deshpande, Hanumanthrao and Govindrao Yalgi took active interest to defend Hari. Deshpande entered as his counsel in court.

The police, suspecting that Deshpande might hamper their investigation, tried to involve him as an accused in the case. Deshpande had been warned earlier to keep away from the case if he wanted to be free. He did not agree and was enraged at the police conspiracy. In turn, the police took him into custody for alleged murder and



fabricated evidence with the help of three persons including an employee of Hari.

Deshpande's arrest on the eve of the Governor's visit to Belgaum at the instance of his opponents in public life prevented him from presenting the civic address as the Vice-President of the Municipal Committee.

The cooked-up case alleged that Deshpande was among those who plotted to kill Shankar. Govindrao Yalgi, determined to foil the case, kept guard of the movements of witnesses. After the evidence of the Investigating Officer, Jaffer Imam, the Government Pleader advised the Magistrate to commit the accused to the sessions for trial. Deshpande's counsel, immediately stepped in and subjected the Investigating Officer to gruelling cross-examination for full four days.

When the Magistrate opined that the evidence adduced was not adequate for committal proceedings, the prosecution decided to produce Hari's employee also.

Under police escorts Hari's employee was brought to Belgaum by train. When the train steamed in, the witness was dragged away forcibly from the carriage and removed quickly to a waiting tonga which soon fled. No sooner did the police escorts realise the escape than they began a vigorous search at the tonga stand. On seeing a tonga with curtains, the police surmised that the witness had been hidden there. When they attempted to search it, they were drawn into an altercation by Govindrao Yalgi and his associates for about 20 minutes. Yalgi yielded when he was certain that the witness was out of reach. The police, after many adjournments, however, managed to get a committal order.

At the court of sessions, Deshpande was released on bail, although Hari was not. At any rate, Deshpande had to slog in gaol as an undertrial for about four months.

Norton, a Calcutta barrister, defended the accused, while the State availed of the services of an equally eminent counsel, Binning, barrister from Bombay. Norton, briefed by Deshpande, proved devastating in cross-examination of the prosecution witnesses. He scoffed at both the Judge and the State Counsel. Once, turning towards Deshpande, Norton asked: "Do you know why Mr. Binning is engaged by Government? He has a beautiful wife." Those who heard had a hearty laugh. Turning to the jury, now and then, he would humour and cajole them. He would often conduct himself as if the judge were a dud.

When the day of judgment came, Deshpande's family was naturally concerned seriously. In the morning, however, a telegram addressed to Deshpande announced the release of Tilak at Pune, and another telegram from Tilak wished him good luck. Deshpande thought of them to be good omens.

When the proceedings commenced, the court hall was overcrowded. Binning, opening his address, pleaded that Deshpande be honourably acquitted as there was no evidence against him. As the Judge pronounced his release, the crowd went into wild cheers.

When the turn of Norton came to address, he made effective use of the defects and discrepancies in the prosecution case, quoting extensively from the police confidential records, copies of which had earlier been stealthily made available at the instance of Govindrao Yalgi. The police felt truly smashed.



When the judge enquired how he could get such confidential information, Norton retorted: "It is no business of the Court to enquire how I got my instructions."

Norton tore to pieces the evidence of the Superintendent of Police, a Briton, as a bundle of lies and exclaimed: "I am ashamed to see my countrymen telling lies in the witness box."

Norton wanted at first to examine Deshpande as a defence witness but later decided it as unnecessary. He, however, put Kamalabai in the witness box. When in camera examination of her was suggested, Norton frowned and replied when she had been accused in public, let her vindicate herself in the open court. Binning was more than courteous; she came out unscathed from the witness box to the relief especially of Deshpande.

Norton's five-hour address was full of invectives and innuendoes.

After the Judge's summing up, the jury returned un-animously a verdict of 'not guilty' to the repeated cheers of the assembled crowd. The police desired to go in for appeal but the Legal Remembrancer of the State advised against it. Thus ended the legal embroglio by which Deshpande was so harassed.

Deshpande's rejoicing was, however, short-lived, as his wife died a few days later after an operation. She was an old-fashioned devoted lady. He felt guilty of lack of affection towards her. She bore two daughters. As she bore no son, she even advised him to go in for second marriage but he, as a true husband, sternly refused.

## Plunge into Extremist Politics

### I

DESHPANDE BECAME an ardent disciple of Tilak after the latter's return in 1914 from Mandalay and served the cause of the nation strictly as dictated by his master till the latter's end in 1920.

When Tilak returned, the Government became panicky, especially because the World War I had just then started. A press communique was issued drawing attention of the public to the continued hostility of Tilak to the British rule in India and warning them not to keep on supporting him. Tilak's move to form a new party and veiled threat of passive resistance had caused alarm, as only a small segment of the Indian Army had been retained in India for internal security. Police watch was increased on Tilak's activities and visitors to him were carefully observed and they had to record their names and address before meeting Lokmanya Tilak at his residence in Pune.

Tilak had, however, no intention to embarrass the British rulers. He reiterated his earlier stand to strive for *swaraj* by constitutional means. He desired to rejoin the Congress but the Moderates feared that he might usurp their hitherto maintained dominant role in the organisational affairs. Gokhale openly opposed Tilak's re-entry while Besant favoured it.



Tilak was in no hurry. He wanted to study public opinion. His emissaries toured different provinces and discussed with local leaders. Their reports unanimously favoured Tilak's positive action whereupon a Provincial Conference was proposed to be organised. Tilak asked Deshpande to organise it at Belgaum. Deshpande accepted the suggestion and started work. Unfortunately, however, plague soon broke out, necessitating the shifting of the venue from Belgaum to Pune itself. The Conference which was held in 1915 at Kirloskar Theatre, was presided over by Baptista, barrister of Bombay. The President outlined the organization of the Home Rule League. A resolution was adopted giving concrete shape thereto.

As Gokhale had passed away a few months earlier, a resolution of condolence moved by Tilak was also passed. Tilak, choked with emotion, paid glowing tributes to the departed leader, despite his political rivalry.

At such conferences, it was customary to place on record the loyalty of the people to the British Throne. A simple resolution was proposed therefor, but Deshpande opposed it at the Subjects Committee. He wanted to give a go-bye to that 'meaningless' tradition although Belvi, also of Belgaum, resented it. As Tilak did not want confrontation, Deshpande had to withdraw his opposition. The next conference, proposed by Belvi and seconded by Deshpande, was decided to be held at Belgaum.

In December 1915, the Congress Session was held at Bombay. Sir S.P. Sinha, who presided, was not prepared for supporting Home Rule. He contended that even if the British rulers were to grant it then, it would be too premature. Besant strove hard for the adoption of a resolution directly favouring Home Rule, but it was ruled

out by the president as inconsistent with the Congress aims and objects.

A resolution close to it was, however, adopted, moved by Surendranath Banerjee and seconded by Annie Besant.

The resolution declared that the time had now come to introduce full measures of reform towards the attainment of self-government by liberalising the system of government so as to secure to the people an effective control over it.

The Congress constitution was also amended to throw open the doors of entry to the Extremists, whereupon Tilak announced his willingness to cooperate.

Besant started forming the Home Rule League at provincial capitals to spread up the realisation of the ideal of *swaraj*. Among those who joined the Bombay League were M.A. Jinnah, Shankarlal Banker and Jamnadas Dwarakadas. Many Moderate leaders supported the demand. C.Y. Chintamani and G. Raghava Iyer spoke in public at Pune under Tilak's presidentship. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri urged that the Congress President should have demanded the grant of *swaraj* within a stipulated period of 25 or 30 years.

After the Congress session, Tilak addressed himself to the task of shaping the Congress as a powerful instrument of constitutional but militant Indian Nationalism and supporting it through the Home Rule movement. He wanted the Provincial Conference, scheduled to be held at Belgaum in April 1916, to consider ways and means of achieving the national objective.

Deshpande, as the Secretary of the Reception Committee, started organising work in January 1916. He visited towns and villages to mobilise support in money and



men. As Tilak was to attend it soon after his six-year incarceration, the Conference was all important. Tilak requested Vitthalbhai Patel to preside but he chose not to get himself entangled in extremist politics. Khaparde was, therefore, requested to preside.

A preliminary meeting was held at Pune, on invitation from Tilak. Deshpande attended it. Heated debate took place whether the Nationalists should enter into a compromise with the Moderates. Learning that Tilak was not opposed to such a move, Deshpande returned to Belgaum, determined to mobilise support for Tilak.

The Conference was held at a circus tent, attended by 2,200 delegates, besides thousands of observers. Tilak and Khaparde were brought to the venue in a grand procession. Scramble for entry was so great that many five-rupee visitor tickets were sold in black for fifty rupees each. A large crowd of disappointed people had to be pacified with public appearance and speech later by Tilak elsewhere.

The Conference was also blessed with the participation of Gandhiji. He was persuaded to attend by Kaka Kalelkar at the repeated request of Deshpande. An attempt was, however, made by some moderate elements to prevent Gandhiji from attending the Conference. As Gandhiji was expected to join the Servants of India Society, Deshpande thought he was more inclined towards the moderate group. However, as he wanted, to be certain, Deshpande sent a telegram to Gandhiji who promptly replied on a card which stated, "Nothing but death can prevent me from going to Belgaum and attending the Conference." Deshpande's joy knew no bounds, so was that of his friends. Widest publicity was soon given to Gandhiji's expected visit. Although he was not so popu-

lar as Tilak, people from far and near came in thousands to see and hear him.

The Conference considered two important resolutions. The first was on compromise with Moderates while the second was on *swaraj*. Both were adopted. Tilak emphasised on unity for securing national freedom.

There was a demand for a speech by Gandhiji. He spoke in Hindi, favouring genuine compromise. He said: "If you pass the resolution with the idea that after joining the Congress, you would drive away your opponents in it, neither the Congress, nor the Extremists will gain anything thereby for the country." He added that even without a compromise the two groups could work separately for the realisation of their common ideal of *swaraj*. His speech produced favourable reaction in both the camps.

Deshpande desired and arranged for a heart-to-heart talk between Tilak and Gandhiji before they left Belgaum. Tilak himself met Gandhiji at his lodge. He was accompanied by Khaparde which Deshpande demurred. The talk which was free and frank went on for full one hour. Deshpande remained at the door, preventing intruders from getting in. Coming out, Khaparde remarked that Gandhiji was not of their kind.

The non-Brahmin leaders of Belgaum, taking the opportunity of the presence of Gandhiji, invited him to address them and their followers. Gandhiji obliged them. He had earlier received complaints in private against Brahmin leaders. Nationalist that he was, Gandhiji forcefully advised them to shed their parochial outlook and join hands with others to liberate the country from foreign yoke.



After the Provincial Conference had concluded, a Home Rule League was set up with Baptista as President, Deshpande as Vice-President and Narasimha Chintaman Kelkar as Secretary.

Tilak addressed a public meeting whereat he explained the demand for Home Rule. Before leaving Belgaum, Tilak heartily congratulated Deshpande for the success of the Conference and transferred the garland from his neck to his, amidst cheers from the assembled admirers.

Tilak was earlier entertained at dinner by Deshpande at his residence to which the elite of Belgaum had come. When an invitee asked Tilak as to what he would do when *swaraj* came, he replied promptly, "We have to ensure the Government functioning for the good of the people; else, we have to agitate and, if need be, go to gaol."

Encouraged by the signal success of this Provincial Conference, the Belgaum leaders aspired for organising the Congress session itself there as early as the occasion could arise. Govindrao Yalgi from then on began to gather information and study arrangements made elsewhere for huge gatherings to equip himself for the onerous task. Alas! He was not alive, when actually a Congress session was held at Belgaum in 1924.

A few days prior to the Belgaum Provincial Conference, a young man called on Deshpande and offered his services for the country. He was Narayan Thammaji Kathakade; who came to be known later as Pundalikji. Deshpande looked upon him as a member of his own family and he served his master with devotion till the death of Deshpande.

## 2

Deshpande and other close associates celebrated the

60th birthday of Tilak with great eclat in July 1916 at Pune. They presented a purse of rupees one lakh as a token of the nation's gratitude to his selfless services.

Deshpande, like his associates elsewhere, went about and collected fund from high and low alike. Copies of a picture depicting Tilak's promotion of friendly relations between India and Britain, drawn as suggested by Paranjpe, were sold in thousands to raise subscription. Contributions were given generously and enthusiastically everywhere and there was no difficulty in achieving the target.

The public function was held at the gaily decorated spacious Gaekwad Wada grounds. People of all castes and classes in thousands drawn from far-away and nearby towns and villages, congregated to pay their tribute of admiration and gratitude to the great leader. The gathering occupied every inch of space of the grounds and spilled over to the adjoining streets. Annasaheb Patwardhan presided over the function. Belvi read the address in English and Paranjpe the Marathi version. After Khare and Karandikar, who were friends of Tilak, had spoken, Deshpande, at the instance of Baburao Gokhale, was called upon to address as a disciple. Though overwhelmed with emotion, Deshpande delivered an oration which was remembered as one of his best for many years to come. He declared, at the outset, that he was offering humble respect and regard on behalf of lakhs of disciples spread over the length and breadth of India, to the master who was leading them unerringly with tremendous sacrifice and suffering as well as with unrivalled fearlessness to their cherished goal. The assembly immediately broke into prolonged loud applause. Deshpande declared that the philosophy of Tilak was eternal and Tilak's name would live so long as



there was value for selfless, fearless, determined and humble service.

Tilak, in reply, spoke briefly with transparent humility and gratitude. Tilak gave a clarion call for the liberation of India when he declared, "The national work which faces us today is so great and extensive that all of you must work together with zeal and courage. It is a task which cannot be put off. Our motherland calls upon every one of us to show our mettle. There is no room for rivalry or jealousy, honour or insult. It is certain that, if not we, the next generation will gather the fruits." Tilak made over the purse for national work.

Soon after, on 21 October 1916, the Bombay Provincial Conference was held at Ahmedabad, organised by Moderates. As had been decided at the Belgaum session that Nationalists should co-operate, a strong contingent of them from Maharashtra and Karnataka went to Ahmedabad. Deshpande travelled with Tilak from Pune. Although the Reception Committee, dominated as it was by Moderates, had made no arrangement for the reception of Tilak, Gandhiji had himself issued an appeal for a public reception to him. Thousands of people had gathered at the railway station and cheered as Tilak was received by Gandhiji personally. Tilak was taken in a grand procession in a Victoria, Gandhiji sitting beside him. Deshpande rejoiced at this rare spectacle of the two great leaders, sitting side by side, receiving the people's repeated ovation. He thought Tilak was accorded more than a royal welcome and it was quite in contrast to that accorded to him at Surat in 1907. He marvelled at the sea-change in the political climate of Gujarat, brought about by Gandhiji.

Presiding over the Conference, Jinnah explained the

national memorandum presented earlier to the Viceroy under the signatures of himself, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Srinivasa Sastri, Madan Mohan Malaviya, D.E. Watcha, B.N. Basu, Ibrahim Rahimtoollah and others. The memorandum had been drafted by Gokhale but he was not alive to subscribe his signature.

Tilak spoke in support of *swaraj*.

Deshpande had a 20-minute interview with Gandhiji at his Ashram. They had an intimate talk on the political situation, as a result of which Gandhiji was given a place of pride in Deshpande's estimate.

Deshpande, there, for the first time, saw Vitthalbhai Patel, who was then a member of the Bombay Legislature; he was in European dress.

In December 1916, the Congress met at Lucknow. Both the Moderates and the Extremists were in large number, which roused tremendous popular enthusiasm. It was the first session, after the Surat split, where both the groups had assembled together. Over 500 delegates from Maharashtra and Karnataka had gone there. A special train took them from Bombay to Lucknow. *En route*, Tilak was cheered at many stations. At Bhopal, a large congregation of Muslims greeted him. On arrival at Lucknow, he was given a rousing reception amidst cries of *Tilak Maharaj ki jai*. He was taken in procession in a carriage, drawn not by horses but by volunteers. Deshpande, who had accompanied Tilak, felt convinced that the spontaneous demonstrations of the people's affection for his master gave a fitting rebuff to the hostility of the British Administration.

Members of the Subjects Committee were elected by the delegates. A list for the Bombay Province was drawn



up and most of the members happened to be Nationalists. The list was adopted. Deshpande was among those elected. As Gandhiji's name had not been included, Tilak sought revision of the list, his followers winking. The Congress President nominated, by virtue of his powers, some Moderate leaders to the committee to tilt the scales. Yet, the composition of the committee was largely Nationalist. It unmistakably indicated that the Nationalists had begun to dominate over the Congress organisation.

A.C. Mazumdar, who presided, was happy at the reunion of the Moderates and the Extremists and extended a hearty welcome particularly to Tilak and his followers.

The Congress called for a proclamation from the British Government announcing that it was their aim and intention to confer self-government on India at an early date; that as a definite step in that direction, the 'Congress-League scheme' for *swaraj* should be forthwith granted and that in the reconstruction of the Empire, India should be removed from the position of a dependency and placed as an equal partner in the Empire with self-governing Dominions. The Congress thus forged Hindu-Muslim unity.

Tilak lent his full support to communal unity. Deshpande felt agreeably surprised at his master's foresight. The Lucknow session was attended by as many as 2,301 delegates and the observers exceeded 10,000.

The Congress session was immediately followed by a Home Rule Conference, attended by over 1,000 delegates, Besant presided.

Tilak, who addressed, referred to the Hindu-Muslim accord and said, "There is a feeling that excessive con-

cessions were made to our Mussalman brethren but they were necessary to enlist their full co-operation to press our demand for self-government. We cannot make headway without their support. If they get more concessions and weightage, their responsibility for getting and preserving *swaraj* will correspondingly increase. If there is a tripartite struggle, two parties must join together to eliminate the third. In the tug of war with the British, the Muslims must throw their weight on our side. To demand fearlessly that we shall rule ourselves in our home is our immediate duty."

Returning from the Congress session, Deshpande engaged himself to mobilise popular support for the Home Rule movement. After setting up a branch of the League at Belgaum, he toured the interior districts to enthuse people. A vigorous campaign for membership was also launched. There was no apprehension whatsoever, it was explained, that the Home Rule League functioned as a catalytic agent for the realisation of the Congress objective.

In June 1917, Besant was interned at Ootacamund in Tamil Nadu. This action of the Government gave a fillip to the Home Rule agitation all over the country. In Bombay, the League led by Shankarlal Banker, Jamnadas Dwarakadas and Umar Sobhani, carried on its activities with added vigour. Jamnadas through *Young India* and Horniman through *Bombay Chronicle* carried the message to all classes of intelligentsia. At Shantaram Chawl, public meetings were held every evening. Deshpande attended many of them and derived inspiration for further action. Sometimes, he also addressed them in Marathi.

The next Bombay Provincial Conference was held at Nasik in May 1917. Delegates from both the groups were



present. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri presided. Although a Moderate, Sastri gave a spirited dissertation on Home Rule and the proceedings favoured the Nationalists who were present in large numbers. As a large part of the proceedings had to be conducted in Marathi, Kelkar was in charge. Baptista moved a resolution on *swaraj*, seconded by Tilak. It was passed unanimously.

After the Provincial Conference concluded, a Home Rule Conference was held, Baptista presiding. Deshpande actively participated in both. He also attended the public meetings, held every evening at the Yeshvantrao Maharaj grounds and addressed some of them.

### 3

The tempo of the World War I rose so high at the time (August 1917) that the British Government decided to appease the Indian sentiment to step up war-effort; the Government thought that a major step towards self-government was called for. Montagu, the then Secretary of State, declared "the policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to progressive realisation of Responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire". He conceded that the Government of India was "far too wooden, far too iron, far too inelastic and far too ante-diluvian to subserve its purposes in modern times".

Soon thereafter, Besant was released and the political climate in the country improved rapidly.

Montagu himself visited India for an on-the-spot study. He received a joint deputation of the Congress and the

Home Rule League. Deshpande was a member of the deputation. A joint memorandum was submitted by Besant to Montagu when the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, was also present. She introduced the members of the delegation.

Deshpande was wearing boots, advised by some friends. He was wearing them for the first time in his life. Tilak, however, was with his usual Puneri chappals, while Gandhiji was bare-foot. Deshpande felt not a little embarrassed. Returning posthaste, he removed the boots and never wore them again.

As the members of the delegation were waiting for the interview, Malaviya and Tilak were engaged in conversation. Deshpande heard Malaviya telling Tilak, "You are very bitter in your speeches and writings." Tilak promptly replied, "Yes, as some of you have too much butter." On this remark, both of them heartily laughed.

In April 1917, the Belgaum District Political Conference was held at Chikodi, under the presidentship of R.P. Karandikar. On request by Deshpande, Tilak came from Pune and addressed the Conference. He also addressed two or three meetings. From Chikodi, Tilak went to Nipani. *En route*, he was cheered by villagers who had lined up on either side of the road. He was given sugarcane juice, a product of the season, besides fruits, at several places. The scramble by the people for *darshan* was so great that he was unable to keep up his schedule of programme. He had to forego his rest and sleep. He could dine only after midnight. He was, however, overwhelmed by popular enthusiasm everywhere; so was Deshpande.

Nipani programme, which had been fixed for the evening, was carried out next morning, as Tilak could reach



the town late in the night. Addressing a mammoth public meeting there, Tilak said, "Nipani produces best quality tobacco, but for best cheroots we have to look up to Egypt. This must stop and *swaraj* can put a stop to it."

Deshpande accompanied Tilak in this tour and the success of the tour was largely due to his personal efforts. He was ably supported by no less a person than Belvi.

In a humorous vein, Deshpande called Tilak as 'Kerappa', a herb in Kannada. Asked to explain, he said that, like the medical practitioner of his region who used to draw a mark on the person of every patient, saying that it cured the disease, Tilak was saying everywhere that *swaraj* was the panacea for all our political, social and economic ills. Tilak nodded his head in approval with a broad smile.

A few days later, the District Political Conference was held at Chanda in the erstwhile Central Provinces. Deshpande presided over it. Tilak was also present. Both of them were enthusiastically received and taken in a procession. A public meeting was held, which both addressed.

Earlier, at Wardha, they spoke at a largely-attended public meeting. After the Conference, Deshpande, who was accompanied by Vamanrao Joshi, spent two days at Amraoti, before returning to Belgaum.

It was Tilak who, in July 1917, first suggested that Besant be elected president of the next session of the Congress, scheduled to be held at Calcutta in December 1917. It was immediately accepted and all the Provincial Congress Committees nominated her. A special train from Bombay carried Tilak and Deshpande with more than 500 other delegates to Calcutta. Calcutta Congress turned out to be the Extremists' (Nationalists/Home Rule Leaguers) Congress. It was attended by 4,967 delegates

and over 5,000 observers. All the resolutions passed were suggested by Tilak and Chittaranjan Das. Gandhiji was present but was not prominent.

The political resolution called for the immediate enactment of a parliamentary statute providing for the establishment of responsible government in India at an early date, the full measure to be attained within a time-limit to be fixed in the statute itself. As the first step, it suggested the implementation of the Congress-League scheme.

Besant in her Presidential address, earlier, demanded a bill to be passed in British Parliament establishing self-government in India, on the lines of those of the dominions of the British Commonwealth, within about 5 to 10 years, the intermediate 3 to 10 years being occupied by the transference of power from the British to the Indian hands.

At that time, a constitutional expert from England had come to India. He was one Curtis. After discussion with leaders in England and India, he drafted a package of constitutional reforms wherein he provided for a very limited provincial autonomy, leaving the Central Administration completely untouched. Some of the Indian leaders fell in love with the Curtis Plan. Prominent among them was C.R. Das; presumably, he thought even limited self-rule at the provincial level was an advance over the then existing set-up. Tilak was, however, totally opposed to it. He understood that it was a British trick to silence at least for a while the Indian leaders who were clamouring for dominionhood. He and other leaders who shared his thinking strove hard to mould the Indian public opinion against it.

Gandhiji, having received at Lucknow complaints of ill-treatment of indigo agriculturist tenants at Champaran



in Bihar, decided to go there and look into the problems personally. When he entered Champaran district and was proceeding towards a place, eight kilometres away from the district headquarters of Motihari, a messenger from the Police Superintendent appeared, presented compliments on behalf of his boss and served on him a quit order under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Gandhiji acknowledged it by writing that he did not propose to comply with it and would not leave Champaran till his enquiry was over. He was thereupon served with a summons to face trial in court the next day for disobeying the order. The news spread like wild fire and it looked as though the country as a whole had been ablaze. The authorities at Delhi got truly frightened.

When the trial began next morning, the Government Pleader pressed the Magistrate to postpone further proceedings. Gandhiji, immediately intervening, requested the Magistrate not to adjourn as he was pleading guilty. The Magistrate and the Government Pleader were both taken aback. The Magistrate took time till the evening to deliver judgment.

In the meanwhile, instructions were received not only for Gandhiji's release but also for active co-operation with him. Gandhiji commented: "According to the law, I was to be on my trial but, truly speaking, Government was to be on its trial. The Commissioner of Police only succeeded in trapping Government in the net which he had spread for me."

To take up and continue the work, Gandhiji needed workers. He sent word to Deshpande as to others. Kalelkar also wrote to him. He sent his trusted lieutenant, Babasaheb Soman. He went to Bheethiharao village and started work. There were also at work others including

Dr. Deo and Mrs. Avantikabai Gokhale of the Servants of India Society. Babasaheb opened a school in a thatched hut. When fire destroyed the hut, he constructed a mud hut himself, assisted by the local villagers. When Babasaheb returned to Belgaum, a call came to Deshpande to send a substitute. Deshpande sent Pundalik, another trusted lieutenant of his although he was not as seasoned as Babasaheb. Pundalik stayed there for an year. When a quit order was served on him, Pundalik went to Sabar-mati Ashram and stayed there for one year under Gandhiji's tutelage. The experience stood him in good stead when later Swaraj Ashram and National School were started at Belgaum and the no-tax campaign was launched at Miraj under the leadership of Deshpande. When Pundalik came back from Bihar, Deshpande deputed Shankarrao Deo of Maharashtra, who later played a prominent role in the freedom struggle.

After Deo had returned, Deshpande wanted to go himself and work there for a few months but could not do so due to pressure of political work in his home district.

Although relationship with Gandhiji was getting closer, Deshpande was not sure of his conviction in non-violence. Gandhiji's active co-operation with the British war-effort created confusion in Deshpande's mind. He shared Tilak's confirmed view that Britain's interest was not identical with that of India. His friends also suspected the British intentions.

A public meeting was organised at Balgaum and Khadilkar had come from Pune to speak. As he was a close associate of Tilak, the authorities served a gag order on him. He attended the meeting and Deshpande spoke in the way he wanted.

A few days later, the Bombay Privincial Political Con-



ference met at Bijapur (now in Karnataka), Vitthalbhai Patel presided. The delegates expected both Gandhiji and Tilak would speak in support of their respective stand-points opposed to each other. But, Tilak could not be present; Deshpande was requested to speak. Gandhiji did not want to speak in the absence of Tilak. Deshpande thus lost an opportunity to rebut Gandhiji's argument.

At the Bijapur Conference, Deshpande had the privilege of befriending Senapati Bapat who was then the editor of *Mahratta* which was highly critical of Tilak. As the World War I was then going on, recruitment to the army was in full swing everywhere including Bijapur. One evening Bapat, who was on his way to his camp from the venue of the Conference, witnessed a young boy being coerced to join the army, while the boy's widowed mother was crying bitterly. Bapat was also very much moved and tears rolled out of his eyes spontaneously. Deshpande tried to console him, but could not. He left Govindrao Yalgi to look after him. Later, Deshpande took him to Belgaum for rest. Tilak, who came to know of Bapat's stay with Deshpande, advised that he be looked after well. Tilak had no axe to grind against his political rivals.

The Delhi Government, in order to mobilise public support for the British war-effort, organised conferences at provincial capitals. One such conference was held on 10 June 1917 at Bombay which was presided over by the Governor, Lord Willingdon. Tilak and Gandhiji were among the invitees. Tilak prepared the text of his speech which he intended to deliver. Gandhiji was expected to speak. Tilak met him with a view to soften his stand. Deshpande was present at their talk, Gandhiji insisted that the question of *swaraj* should not at all be raised. Of course, Tilak disagreed. Later, it was made known

that Gandhiji would not address the Conference. Deshpande felt that Tilak's stand had paid a dividend; it was no small gain for the Home Rule protagonists. When at the conclusion of the Conference, invitees were leaving the hall, Tilak, patting Gandhiji on his back, remarked: "You have yet to understand the mind of this Government. I have spent 40 years of my life in a struggle with it and have burnt my fingers. When you see the true colour of the Government, you will become a better extremist than I. I hope that day will come soon."

The conference was not a success for the Government. When Tilak referred to the demand of self-rule, the Governor interrupted him. Tilak, however, declared, "In the event of an invasion of India, Indians will defend their motherland even by laying down their lives. But, it is not possible for them to dissociate self-defence from self-government." He then walked out. Kelkar, Horniman, Jamnadas Dwarakadas and Bomanji also attempted to refer to the political demand but they were promptly interrupted whereupon they too walked out. Jinnah referred tactfully to the same matter when the Governor exclaimed, "What is the use of urging things for my attention which are beyond my doing?"

The next day, Tilak issued a statement justifying his conduct. A public meeting was held at Shantaram Chawl. Gandhiji, presiding, criticised the Governor strongly; he said, "His attitude is ungenerous and indefensible. Such insult to a tribune of the people like Tilak can only do harm to the cause of the British Empire."

In 1918, a special session of the Congress was held at Bombay. Syed Hasan Imam presided. Most of the Moderates abstained, but Tilak endeavoured to persuade at least some of their leaders to attend. Malaviya also



tried likewise. Hoping they would cooperate, the session was postponed by a day. Tilak wanted Gandhiji to attend; he sent a letter on Deshpande's advice; Soman delivered it. Gandhiji was, however, too ill. Deshpande was very sore at the attitude of the Moderates. Even in the midst of a national crisis, bemoaned Deshpande, they could not extend their hand of friendship.

Babasaheb Paranjpe wanted all the delegates to wear *swadeshi* dress when they attended the Congress session; he did propaganda therefor and wanted to humiliate those who disobeyed. Tilak admonished him as he did not want the delegates to be offended on a trivial matter. After a good deal of heated discussion, Paranjpe told Tilak, "I disagree but I shall obey." Tilak was saved of a tiff.

The Congress session reaffirmed that the people of India were fit for responsible government and repudiated the assumption to the contrary contained in the government report. The reform proposals were characterised as "disappointing and unsatisfactory".

Rajagopalachari from Madras was among the prominent leaders who attended the session. Deshpande met him there for the first time. He also saw Motilal and Jawaharlal, father and son, who were then in western dress from top to toe.

## VI

### End of An Era

#### 1

TILAK VISITED England not only for the Chirol Case\* but also to urge for India's freedom before politicians there and the British Parliamentary Committee.

Tilak went to Colombo to proceed from there to London. He was given a hearty send-off at a public function in Bombay; he was also presented with a purse. *En route*, at several railway stations, he was cheered and given funds.

Deshpande was not in favour of Tilak's visit. He held the view that the Chirol case had been looked upon as a political case and the Government of Bombay and the Kolhapur Darbar had both considered it as their own. The evidence adduced in support of Chirol was all officially supplied. It was quite inconceivable for Deshpande that the Government would adopt an attitude of neutrality where Tilak was directly concerned. Deshpande did not also believe that any representations in England would break the British fetters on India. At the Bombay meeting, Deshpande gave vent to his feeling; he called it a delusion on the part of Tilak to expect justice from British Judges. Of course, Tilak demurred.

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\*Sir Valentine Chirol, foreign editor of *The Times* of London, visited India in 1910 and wrote articles, later published in a book-form, *Indian Unrest*, making libellous allegations against Tilak. Tilak filed a suit for defamation in London,



Before starting on his journey, Tilak asked Deshpande to tender advice to Jagannath Maharaj of Kolhapur, whenever sought for, and look after the publication of *Kesari* at Pune in his absence.

With Tilak, Deshpande and a few other close associates including Sathe, Velkar, Khaparde and Gokhale, proceeded to Colombo. At Madras, Tilak stayed with Besant. A dinner was given in his honour under the great famous banyan tree at Adyar. Tilak spoke, as also Bepin Chandra Pal, who was present. Others who spoke included Khaparde, Kelkar and Karandikar.

Tilak and party left Madras by the Boat Mail. They passed through several important towns including Madurai, where Tilak was profusely garlanded and lustily cheered. They reached Talaimanar in Sri Lanka at night and Colombo the next morning.

At Colombo, a reception committee had been formed to receive Tilak and give him a send-off. Replying to the grand reception, both Tilak and Pal spoke.

The reception committee included one Pawar as its member; he belonged to the Maratha community. He was an officer in the Colombo Municipality. His wife and daughter-in-law looked after the arrangements for food. Pawar's daughter-in-law came from Belgaum and Deshpande recognised her; her father, Ganapati Rao, was known to him. Deshpande noticed that the reception committee consisted of Indians belonging to different regions and communities. They all worked as Indians first and last. They were united at least in a foreign land: Deshpande admired their patriotism.

At Colombo Port, the ship to sail for England had anchored. When Tilak and other members of his party

were ready to get into the ship, a message was received that their passports had been impounded. The message was confirmed on enquiry at the Secretariat. Tilak sent an urgent message requesting for passport, but of no avail. The party had to stay there for a few days before they could sail for England.

Deshpande did not stay there for long. He went to Anuradhapura and visited the ancient temples. He visited Kandy also. He was much impressed with the scenic beauty of Sri Lanka. Deshpande next visited Rameswaram, Madurai and several other places of interest. With him were Khaparde and Velkar. While Khaparde went to Madras and Velkar to Bombay, Deshpande returned to Belgaum via Bangalore.

As Kelkar and Vidwauns were looking after the publication of *Kesari* at Pune, Deshpande had no need to take direct interest in it. He was in correspondence with Jagannath Maharaj and his Administrator, Yeshvantrao and he was tendering advice whenever found necessary.

A conference of the Mahratta community was held at Belgaum to support fully the Congress demand. Deshpande invited Ramarao Deshmukh, a young barrister from Amraoti, to preside. He was given a rousing reception in which the local Congressmen also participated. The Conference demonstrated that the Mahratta community of Belgaum was not in favour of the non-Brahmin movement which had been started in 1916 by Artal and Latthe. Later, the Maharaja of Kolhapur sowed seeds of discord in the community, which got thereby divided.

Soon after, the Belgaum District Political Conference was organised at Athani. The Municipal President, Noorendappa, was Chairman of the reception committee. He was a prominent Lingayat leader. Some Lingayats



who were spear-heading the non-Brahmin movement in the district attempted to persuade Noorendappa to non-cooperate, but were unsuccessful. They organised, at the same time, a non-Brahmin Conference there and took out a portrait of His Majesty, the King of England, in a procession as a mark of their loyalty to government and disapproval of the nationalist movement.

However, the Political Conference went off as scheduled. Khadilkar presided. He was accorded an enthusiastic reception and taken out in a procession. At the Conference, Deshpande moved a resolution for the eradication of untouchability. It was passed unanimously. Earlier, practice was not to bring forward at political conferences propositions touching on social matters, but there was a departure this time. Neither Khadilkar nor anyone else objected to it.

A section of local Kannada leaders felt offended as Maharashtrians dominated the Athani Conference and boycotted it. Deshpande regretted their attitude as the issue before the Conference was national and not linguistic.

Gandhiji had taken the lead in the *swadeshi* movement at Bombay. He had also been organising meetings to protest against the Rowlett Act which aimed at suppressing the national movement.

Deshpande spoke at a public meeting over which Gandhiji himself presided. Deshpande was still suspicious of Gandhiji's intentions in the matter of extremist nationalism. He was in a quandary as to what he should speak. Being a close associate of Tilak, he mustered enough courage and spoke on boycott of British goods. The audience, who were predominantly Maharashtrians, cheered him repeatedly. Nonetheless, he had a feeling that

Gandhiji would strike a discordant note. But Gandhiji did not do so; after the meeting he invited Deshpande for a talk next day. Deshpande met him as desired and explained his stand. Gandhiji argued that there was an element of hatred in boycott and hatred was opposed to non-violence. Deshpande exchanged views with him during the next 4—5 days also. In the end, Deshpande felt convinced that he had been converted. All his conduct thenceforth was governed by truth and non-violence only.

Among Deshpande's close co-workers in Belgaum at the time, were Krishnarao Karguppikar, Dattopont Majli and Bhimarao Potdar. They all were young, enthusiastic and obedient. They helped Deshpande selflessly in public work.

In 1921, Govindrao Yalgi was involved in a criminal case. On a Saturday in the weekly shandi, a retail vendor woman was man-handled by a police constable in front of his shop in Khade Bazaar. Yalgi intervened. The police constable got enraged and misbehaved. Thereupon, the police constable was assaulted by persons in the crowd; later, Yalgi and some others were prosecuted. Deshpande was then at Bombay. On return, Deshpande studied the case. He had no doubt that the policeman had misbehaved but thought that the crowd should not have taken the law into its own hands. He spoke to Yalgi. Gandhian that he was, Yalgi expressed regret and the case was withdrawn.

## 2

On return to Bombay, Tilak was accorded a grand reception and an address of gratitude by Deshpande at a meeting at Shantaram Chawl. In his reply, Tilak observed



that they should accept the reforms though they were far short of their demand and they should strive hard for the realisation of the final objective. Tilak also remarked in a lighter vein that he had been deprived by Gandhiji of an opportunity to participate in *satyagraha* as it had been launched in his absence. Deshpande understood thereby that Tilak was not opposed to Gandhiji politically.

When Tilak left for Madras, Deshpande accompanied him. At Madras, Tilak stayed with Subba Rao Kamat. Many Maharashtrian residents and several political leaders met him and discussed with him the prevailing situation. Sir Subramanya Aiyar, Besant's close disciple, was among those who met him. Tilak addressed a meeting at the Law College. He was honoured at a dinner, given by Kasturi Ranga Iyengar, Editor of *The Hindu*. Rajagopalachari was one of those present. After dinner, there was an exchange of views amongst the leaders on the proposed constitutional reforms. Tilak stayed on for 3-4 days at Madras and Deshpande did not fail to notice Tamil-Andhra differences prevailing.

The Congress session of 1919 was held at Amritsar, Motilal Nehru presided. A special train, as before, ran from Bombay to Amritsar carrying Tilak, Deshpande and other delegates of South India. During the journey, the leaders conferred on the British Proclamation, issued a few days earlier. Deshpande also participated in the discussion. As a result of the exchange of views, Tilak sent a telegram offering "responsive cooperation". His telegram was criticised as ill-conceived and he had to make strenuous efforts for quite some time to defend himself everywhere.

Moderates were absent at the Amritsar Congress. Sri-

nivasa Sastri was there for a day. He spoke at the meeting of the Subjects Committee welcoming the reforms. Nationalists, however, characterised the reforms as "disappointing, unsatisfactory and unacceptable". Tilak, speaking on the resolution, observed: "We are not satisfied. We want to continue our agitation." Gandhiji stood for acceptance of the reforms but was not able yet to influence the Congress deliberations.

The Ali brothers were present. Deshpande met them privately. They embraced him warmly. Shaukat Ali addressed him as his guru. They worked together till 1927 when the Ali brothers left the Congress.

Immediately after the Amritsar Congress Session, the Pune District Conference was held at Junnar. Deshpande, was the Chairman of the reception committee. Both Moderates and Nationalists were present in appreciable strength. Deshpande feared that they might come to loggerheads. Tilak managed the situation tactfully. Outside the venue, some goondas, set up by the Moderates, shouted slogans and went away when felt exhausted. Tilak was given a civic reception, at which Deshpande was present. Deshpande visited the Shivaneri fort, the birth place of Shivaji. Closeby was a musjid, well-maintained. It indicated to Deshpande that Shivaji was not an enemy of Muslims.

The Belgaum District Conference was held at Sankeshwar. M.S. Aney presided. Tilak, persuaded by Deshpande, attended it. Deshpande moved the resolution on council entry, which was passed, although feeble voices were heard against it from some non-Brahmin leaders.

At night, a public meeting was held and Tilak was presented with an address. A non-Brahmin from the audience protested against the address. Tilak, in his reply, congratulated him and explained how communal



outlook was harmful. For quite some time, in political circles, communal matters were often discussed in which Deshpande participated passionately to vindicate his nationalist stand.

At the Bombay Provincial Conference held at Sholapur, the Moderates with the support of non-Brahmin elements of both Maharashtra and Karnataka attempted to dominate over the proceedings. Besant, who was present, lent her support to them. Kelkar presided over the conference. He read his English Address and the Marathi translation was read by Deshpande. On the reforms resolution, speeches were made by both the Moderate and Nationalist leaders. Paranjpe, Besant and Chandavarkar, among others, spoke for the Moderate view, while Tilak, Deshpande, Savarkar and Karandikar, among others, spoke for the Nationalist view. The resolution, as tabled by the Nationalists, was passed. Moderates, who were humiliated created confusion which invited the police to intervene.

When some Congressmen decided to enter the Council, they formed a separate party called the Congress Democratic Party. Deshpande was present at the Pune Confabulations. He was, however, opposing because he was not sure about taking full advantage of the opportunities that would be created by the reforms. Secondly, the non-Brahmin movement was growing in strength which, he feared, would undermine the nationalist influence amongst the people. He did not want the Congress to be dubbed as a Brahmin organisation. Thirdly, he did not want to become a victim of the British trick, namely to yield to the British appeasement policy, which would delay the realisation of the ultimate objective. His views leaned heavily towards Gandhiji. Yet, like a loyal soldier, he followed Tilak's directives implicitly.

Tilak and Deshpande attended the A.I.C.C. meeting

held in May 1920 at Varanasi. Khaparde, Kelkar and Khadilkar were also present. Tilak did not speak much as he wanted enlightenment from others. He held discussions separately with Motilal Ghosh and Motilal Nehru. Deshpande's reading of Tilak's mind then was that his master was not yet convinced of the rationale of the proposed non-cooperation movement. There was a leaders' meeting at Allahabad to consider the aftermath of the A.I.C.C. session. Tilak had been invited but could not attend. After his return to Bombay, Tilak breathed his last on 1 August 1920. A nation-wide hartal was observed. Deshpande felt forlorn and Gandhiji grieved the loss, saying, "My strongest bulwark is gone. A giant among men has fallen. The voice of the lion is hushed." Tilak's body was cremated on the Chowpatty sands, where stands today a marble statute of the great son of Mother India.



## VII

# Activist for Non-cooperation

### 1

WHEN TILAK passed away, his followers were left in wilderness as they had no inkling whatever of their master's leaning. Tilak was gathering opinion on Gandhiji's non-cooperation plan when he was overtaken by illness. Hence, his close associates, after confabulations at Sardargriha, set up a committee of ten to decide their future course of action. Deshpande, Khaparde, Kelkar, Karandikar, Baptista and Moonje were its members.

Deshpande surmised that Tilak had not made up his mind. He had been advised to air his views unfettered at the Uran Conference which led him to infer that Tilak was not opposed to the proposed plan of action. He had come to know that Tilak supported the Khilafat agitation; Tilak was glad that Gandhiji had already taken the lead and he had no objection 'to play a second fiddle' to him; Tilak was quite prepared to go to gaol even before Gandhiji for the cause. Till then, Tilak had, no doubt, worked within the constitutional frame-work but there was nothing to prove that he would not have supported the non-cooperation movement.

The committee of ten deferred its decision as a special Congress Session which was expected to consider the Gandhian plan anew was drawing near. Deshpande re-

turned to Belgaum, while other leaders went to their respective homes.

A special session of the Congress was, as scheduled, held at Calcutta in September 1920. Deshpande with a strong contingent of delegates from Karnataka and Maharashtra went there. *En route*, in train, the matter was hotly discussed by those present. The consensus appeared to Deshpande to be one of opposition to the Gandhian programme. A few youngmen, however, were in favour of direct action.

At Calcutta, Deshpande stayed with Phanasalkar, a coal merchant. Kelkar, Karandikar and some other leaders also stayed there with him.

Lala Lajpat Rai, who had returned earlier from the United States presided. Gandhiji moved the non-cooperation resolution. The resolution criticised the British attitude towards the Khilafat question and the Punjab wrongs, and resolved to pursue the policy of progressive non-violent non-cooperation until those wrongs were righted and *Swaraj* was established. The resolution also called for (a) surrender of titles and honorary offices and resignation of nominated posts in local bodies; (b) refusal to attend government levees, darbars and other official and semi-official functions held by government officials, or in their honour; (c) gradual withdrawal of children from schools and colleges; (d) gradual boycott of British courts by lawyers and litigants and establishment of private arbitration courts by them for the settlement of private disputes; (e) refusal on the part of the military, clerical and labour classes to offer themselves as recruits for service in Mesopotamia; (f) withdrawal by candidates from election to the reformed councils and refusal on the part of the voters to vote for



any candidate who may, despite the Congress advice, offer himself for election; and (g) boycott of foreign goods.

Most of the stalwarts of the Congress were opposed to the resolution. Lajpat Rai, C.R. Das, B.C. Pal, C. Vijayaraghavacharya, Besant and Kasturi Ranga Iyengar were amongst them. Shaukat Ali and Motilal Nehru were among those who supported it. Over 5,000 delegates attended the session. Das had reportedly enlisted hundreds of delegates. Gandhiji, however, remained unperturbed. He took no notice of what others did. He did not ask any delegates specifically to support him. He made no such suggestion either to Deshpande who had met him twice or thrice, Gandhiji bluntly told the delegates, "If you have the same feeling burning in you as in me for the honour of Islam and the Punjab, then you will unreservedly accept my resolution."

The resolution was debated for over six hours and it was passed by 1,855 votes to 873. Deshpande was among those who opposed the resolution. Gandhiji saw him casting his negative vote; he appears to have remarked that Deshpande's heart was with him. Das had thought that he had great support in his home city and province, but to his consternation it proved otherwise.

Gandhiji, commenting on the outcome, remarked, "The country wants non-cooperation." If the people had boycotted governmental institutions and suspended payment of taxes, the British would have quit, he underscored. And, Jinnah said, "There is no other course open to the people except to inaugurate the policy of non-cooperation, though not necessarily the programme of Mr. Gandhi."

Those, who were defeated, were not disheartened as they decided to put their strength to trial again at the

regular session of the Congress at the end of the year.

In the meantime, the followers of Tilak discussed the situation afresh and finally decided to support the Congress Policy, whatever it might be. Deshpande himself came to the conclusion that Tilak would not have failed to co-operate with Gandhiji in the implementation of the latter's programme and if there were any differences as to details, both would have discussed and sorted them out. Accordingly, Deshpande withdrew his candidature from the Council election.

On his way back from Calcutta, Deshpande addressed public meetings at some cities and towns. He supported the Calcutta resolution and found no responsible opposition to it anywhere.

On the day he reached Pune, a public meeting was held. He addressed it and left for Belgaum the same night. Two-three days later, he came across a press criticism which, he thought, was directed against him. The criticism was to the effect that those who had inherited property, had no compunction in calling upon others for self-sacrifice. He was not unduly perturbed thereby.

Bubbling with enthusiasm for patriotic service a young man, Ramachandra V. Vadavi, met Deshpande. He became later his life-long associate. It was Vadavi, among other students, who had pelted stones at the dais in Dharwar when Deshpande started speaking. Leaving the school, he had gone away to join the Gandhi Ashram at Sabarmati. He studied at the Gujarat Vidyapeeth for some time, underwent training in spinning and weaving and worked also as a compositor in the Navjivan Press, where Gandhiji's *Young India* was being printed. In 1922, Gandhiji sent him to Deshpande to work in Karnataka.



Deshpande appointed him Secretary of the Charkha Sangh of Karnataka; he worked in that capacity for 4—5 years. He wrote books for neo-literates and also on *Khadi*. He lived as a member of Deshpande's family like Pundalik.

So many youngsters had met Deshpande from time to time offering their services for the cause of the country. He welcomed and guided them. Among them was Thimmappa Nayak from Karwar. Nayak imbibed the Gandhian spirit so thoroughly that he received approbation from Gandhiji himself. He later proved the mainstay for the Bhoodan work in Karwar. Deshpande was running an ashram at Hudli for the workers. After training they dispersed to different places for service.

Deshpande started in right earnest to enthuse people for non-cooperation movement. Majli, who had given up his practice at the bar, was his close associate. Wherever they went, they addressed public meetings and discussed matters with local leaders. If Deshpande spoke in Marathi, Majli would speak in Kannada. On hearing reports that a move was afoot to reverse the trend at the next session of the Congress at Nagpur, Deshpande redoubled his efforts to create a climate against it.

After propaganda in Belgaum district, Deshpande and Majli went to Dharwar. Both of them were scheduled to speak at a public meeting in the evening. On arrival, they were received by local leaders and a large number of students. When Deshpande began his speech, as before, in Marathi, stones were hurled at him from different directions. He could not understand why the audience so behaved. He stopped his speech and Majli also did not speak. The meeting ended in confusion. Among those who were responsible for it were some workers who had earlier met and received Deshpande. He came to know

subsequently that they were some of the extremist elements amongst Kannada enthusiasts who were determined to protest openly against his making a Marathi speech. If he had been told earlier, he would have certainly spoken in Kannada. He was not a fanatic. What he wanted was only to communicate his thought to the people. Later, several leaders of the Kannada movement met Deshpande and expressed their regret.

In the night, a public meeting was held at the maidan on Deshpande Road and it was largely attended. It went on for over three hours. Deshpande spoke in Marathi, which was heard without any interruption.

After the Calcutta Congress Session had concluded, Gandhiji undertook a tour of the country to educate the people on the movement which he was shortly to launch. He addressed public meetings which were extensively reported in the press. He wrote also in *Young India*. Deshpande closely followed his writings and speeches. It was not easy at first for him to grasp the concept of truth and non-violence. He made strenuous efforts to understand it and came finally to realise that it was not impracticable.

Deshpande, who was till then wearing *swadeshi* dress, changed over to *khadi*. At the beginning, *dhoti* and turban were not of *khadi*. He was shy to wear *khadi* cap. One day, when he had to address a meeting at the Maruthi temple, he decided to wear it. He carried it in his coat pocket and, when he started to speak, he put it on his head; noticing the change the audience burst into cheers, thereafter he picked up enough courage to wear it regularly. Similar was the experience of other leaders. After all, habits die hard.

When Gandhiji decided to tour Karnataka, he wrote



to Deshpande to make arrangements. Deshpande, assisted by his co-workers, visited places and mobilised public support. The programme included public meetings and collection of funds.

Gandhiji arrived on 8 November 1920 at Nipani, northern town in Belgaum District, from Karad in Maharashtra. He was accorded an enthusiastic reception by Deshpande and others. He addressed a public meeting.

Gandhiji had no compunction in appealing to the women to gift away their jewellery for the national cause. He assured them whatever they gave would be utilised by Gandadharrao Deshpande to promote *swadeshi* and national education there. "Give for the nation, as you would give for the temple. But, giving should be absolutely voluntary." At the meeting many ladies removed jewellery from their person and gave them away to him. The value of their contribution was estimated at over Rs. 2,000. Cash contributions were also received.

Cutting short his Karnataka tour, Gandhiji proceeded to Sangli. The train reached Miraj at noon. People had assembled at the railway station in thousands and with great difficulty Gandhiji could reach the waiting car. People requested him to address them before going to Sangli. As he did not oblige, they obstructed the car. He got down from it and began to walk briskly towards Sangli. Deshpande and other leaders pacified the crowd whereupon they let go the car.

During this tour, Deshpande and Yalgi had several opportunities to exchange views with Gandhiji on his programme of non-cooperation and most of their misgivings were cleared to their satisfaction. Gandhiji incidentally noticed Deshpande wearing mill *dhoti* and

advised him to change over to *khadi*, which he promptly agreed to.

Contributions made in this tour had amounted to about Rs. 22,000. Gandhiji gave a portion of it to Shaukat Ali for the Khilafat movement and the balance to Deshpande for national work.

Prior to Congress session at Nagpur, Das paid a visit to that city. He requested Kelkar to meet him there for talks. Kelkar went there, accompanied by Deshpande and Baptista. Das pleaded for at least five-year preparation for the Gandhian plan of action, but Deshpande did not agree with him. Das addressed a meeting in English explaining his stand, whereas Deshpande spoke in Marathi supporting the new plan. The meeting appeared to Deshpande to support the non-cooperation programme *in toto*.

Kelkar did not give out his mind while Baptista opposed the stand of Deshpande but did not want to go against the Congress policy.

## 2

The Nagpur Congress Session, held in December 1920, attracted a very large number of delegates from all parts of India as it was expected to review the then prevailing political situation in the context of its earlier resolution and take appropriate action. Another item included in the agenda was the revision of the Congress constitution. Deshpande was eager for the formation of linguistic provinces and Tilak was also in its favour.

Deshpande went to Nagpur; in good strength; over 800 delegates from Karnataka had accompanied him. A special train was run from Hubli to Pune.



At Nagpur, group meetings were held amongst the delegates to finalise their respective attitudes on the main resolutions. A joint meeting of delegates from Maharashtra and Karnataka was held. Patankar, a vakil of Nasik, presided. Deshpande and Kelkar spoke supporting the new programme while Belvi opposed it tooth and nail. Patankar, while opposing the non-cooperation programme, used such epithets as broke up the meeting in confusion. Some Maharashtrian delegates issued a joint statement later expressing their solid support to Gandhiji which, of course, cheered Deshpande. He was also satisfied that Karnataka was by and large behind him. Belvi had left Nagpur before the session ended. Das, Lajpat Rai and other leaders, sensing the mood of the delegates, adopted an attitude of acquiescence. Jinnah opposed the resolution amid interruptions. The resolution was, however, passed with overwhelming support.

Pressure was brought to bear upon Gandhiji to be lenient regarding the boycott of law courts but he was firm. The resolution, passed, noted that "the Congress was not satisfied with the way in which the nation's call had been responded to by the lawyers and that greater effort must, therefore, be made". Das and Motilal were among the first to respond to this resolution. Jamnalal Bajaj offered to create a fund of rupees one lakh to aid lawyers who joined the movement and the responsibility of administering the fund, insofar as Karnataka was concerned, fell on Deshpande.

The resolution, reiterating the Calcutta resolution on non-cooperation, declared anew that "the existing Government of India has forfeited the confidence of the country, and the people of India now are determined to establish *swaraj*, as all methods hitherto adopted by the people of India failed to secure due recognition of their

rights and liberties and the redress of their many and grievous wrongs, more especially in reference to Khilafat and the Punjab”.

The revision of the constitution piloted by Gandhiji, was debated for a full day. The object of the Congress as suggested by Gandhiji, was “the attainment of *swaraj* within the British Empire if possible and without if necessary”. Malaviya and Jinnah wanted *swaraj* within the British Empire, while an amendment suggested that *swaraj* be attained by “all legitimate and peaceful means”. Jinnah argued that India would not become free without bloodshed. Ultimately, the article, as adopted, read, “The object of the Congress is the attainment of *swaraj* by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means.”

At the conclusion of the debate, Gandhiji exclaimed, “I regard this constitution with a measure of pride. I hold, that, if we could fully work out this constitution, the mere fact of working it out would bring us *swaraj*. With the assumption of this responsibility, I may be said to have made my real entrance into the Congress politics.” Deshpande extolled Gandhiji as the first leader ever in world history to seek solution of a political problem by means of truth and non-violence. Hitherto, in politics, violence was not considered as violence and untruth was not regarded as untruth. This conception was given a go by Gandhiji and the Congress. It was a unique transformation of the political scene.

As per the revised Congress constitution, Congress Committees were formed throughout the country on linguistic basis. So far as Karnataka was concerned, all Kannada-speaking areas in Bombay (Belgaum, Dharwar, Bijapur and Karwar) and Madras (Bellary and Mangalore) provinces came under one-fold. The princely



states in these areas were also included. The Kannadigas of the regions had never before been so united; they felt immensely pleased at the outcome.

Later, Andhra disputed the claim of Bellary district as a Kannada-speaking area. Kelkar examined the claim and gave a verdict, whereby four talukas including Bellary town were retained in Karnataka while the remaining four talukas came under the jurisdiction of the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee.

A need was felt to run a Marathi newspaper for the popularisation of the Congress policy and programme; after *Rashtramata* had ceased publication, Deshpande and some friends in Maharashtra decided to start one and an announcement was issued under his signature. Response was instant. Dr. Bhadkamkar took keen interest. A private limited company was floated. Deshpande became Director and Dr. Bhadkamkar was appointed Managing Director. Among the other directors were Tatyasaheb Kelkar, Nanasaheb Deshmukh and Annasaheb Nene. A printing press, called the Lokmanya Press, was started and a newspaper, entitled *Lokmanya* was also started under the editorship of Khadilkar.

After the formation of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, Deshpande's association with Maharashtra started declining. Though some parts of Belgaum district are a bi-lingual area, Marathi is predominantly spoken in some places like Chikodi, Nipani and Khanapur. Later Marathi-speaking people urged for transfer of their area to the jurisdiction of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee. Deshpande visited these places personally and successfully persuaded the local leaders to give up their agitation. At public meetings, speeches used to be delivered in both the languages as circumstan-

ces warranted. Gadag was selected for the headquarters of the K.P.C.C. and District Committees were constituted; Deshpande was elected the President of the Pradesh Committee unanimously and continued to function as such till after the Belgaum Congress session.

The reconstituted A.I.C.C. met in Bombay. A working committee was set up. Deshpande was defeated in the election to the Committee by a slender margin of 3 or 4 votes but he was later co-opted. Tatyasaheb Kelkar got elected.

At the Shantaram Chawl in Bombay, a public meeting was held. A large number of students were present. Gandhiji appealed to them to boycott schools and colleges and support the movement. Shaukat Ali also addressed the meeting. He asked those students who were ready to boycott schools or colleges to raise their hands. None responded. Deshpande thought students had not understood the Urdu speech of Shaukat Ali. Deshpande himself then addressed the meeting in Marathi and, at the end of his address, once again asked the students. Students who were in front lines, whom Deshpande stared at, lowered their heads, while a lone student, far away from the dais, rose to signify his readiness to respond to the call. Deshpande beckoned him and enquired his whereabouts. He was glad that the student was a Kannadiga from Bagalkot in Bijapur district, by name T.B. Purohit. The boy gave up his studies and engaged himself in Congress work at his native town; later he took to *khadi* work.

Advised by Gandhiji, Deshpande stayed in Bombay for some time to draw out students from schools and colleges. Assisted by Shankarlal Banker and Umar Sobani, Deshpande organised several student meetings at the Marwadi



Vidyalaya hall and addressed them. Gradually, response from students grew and meetings had to be organised at different educational institutions. Deshpande regularly addressed the meetings wherever held. Baburao Gokhale had been deputed by Kelkar to work with Deshpande. Both of them conveyed the Congress message to students and the response from them was not disheartening. *Kesari* also carried articles in support of the movement, which demonstrated that Maharashtra was not indifferent.

The students, who had come out of their schools or colleges, required to be organised for national work. They had to be provided with lodging and boarding too. Deshpande and friends opened a hostel for them at a Gujarati Mahajanwadi. Vitthalbhai Patel was in charge of their coaching for which a syllabus had also been drawn up. After the training, students were dispatched to their respective native towns or villages to educate the local masses and secure their support for the national programme. Some students stayed back in the hostel and they were shifted to an Ashram in Andheri. Keshavarao Deshpande, a barrister of Baroda, and Pundalik of Belgaum, took charge of the Ashram. Inmates were given training in *Khadi* work as well as agriculture, as adjoining the Ashram was a large plot of land available for experiment. Deshpande used to take keen interest in the working of the Ashram. Later, he organised student training at Pune, Sangli and Dharwar and his efforts met with considerable success.

While at Bombay, Deshpande received a disturbing report that Kelkar at Pune was not personally in favour of boycott of educational institutions. A law student, who approached Kelkar for advice, had been reportedly told to complete his education first and then join the movement.

Kelkar wanted to convert the New Pune College into a national institution for which he wanted Rs. 3 lakhs and asked Deshpande if he could secure help from Gandhiji. Deshpande spoke to Gandhiji who readily agreed to finance. Deshpande sent a telegram accordingly but Kelkar disappointed by disagreeing on the issue of boycott.

Deshpande pursued his efforts for the establishment of national schools at several towns in Karnataka including Nipani, Belgaum, Dharwar, Hubli, Gadag, Bijapur, Sirsi, Kumta and Mangalore. Babasaheb Soman was appointed the headmaster of the Belgaum school. Diwakar, Hukerikar, Datar and others had opened a college at Dharwar which had secured recognition from the University of Bombay. As they converted it into a national institution it was immediately disaffiliated.

In Maharashtra, national schools and colleges were started at several towns. At Pune, Tilak Vidyalyaya was established, and at Bombay medical college was opened. At Ahmedabad, the Gujarat Vidyapeeth was established by Gandhiji himself; it is working even today. However, most of the national schools had to be closed as students enrolment declined rapidly due either to their non-recognition or ban imposed by the Government. Organisers, teachers and students in large number joined the movement and went to gaol. It was clear to Deshpande that their action had created mass-awakening to a degree never before witnessed. Most of those, who joined the movement, had no regrets and they participated in the subsequent movements as well. However, those who had no faith and acted in haste, retraced their steps. Deshpande felt that leaders might be blamed for boycott of schools and colleges but they were all inspired by a lofty ideal. He believed that the leaders had inevitably to take risk if any mass movement had to succeed.



Deshpande regretted, however, that the boycott of courts in Belgaum was not quite a success. Some lawyers refrained from going to courts for one year but carried on their chamber practice during that period with added vigour. Those who actually boycotted the courts were indeed a microscopic minority.

### 3

Gandhiji impressed upon his followers that they could not make India free without sacrifice. A nation, like an individual, he argued, could not rise without being purified by the fire of suffering. "The mother suffers so that her child may live. The condition of wheat-growing is that the seed grain should perish... Will India rise out of her slavery without fulfilling this eternal law of purification through suffering?"

Fearlessness is the sheet-anchor of any *satyagrahi* and it is the base for truth and non-violence; these three elements are in one pack. While calling upon his followers for sacrifice Gandhiji pointed out that if Hampden had not cared to suffer, he would not have withheld payment of ship-money, nor would Wat Tyler have raised the standard of revolt. English and French histories were replete with instances of heroic sacrifices to establish right over might. "Progress is to be measured", Gandhiji remarked, "by the amount of suffering undergone by the sufferer."

Gandhiji toured intensively throughout the length and breadth of India to enthuse people to participate in the non-cooperation movement. He whipped up courage in Congress workers by setting up his own example in thought, word and deed.

When Mohamed Ali was arrested on 14 September 1921, at a public meeting at Waltair, for "tampering with the

loyalty of the sepoys", Gandhiji declared that he himself had done so earlier. "I must be permitted the credit or the odium of suggesting that India had a right openly to tell the sepoy and everyone who served the Government in any capacity whatsoever that he participated in the wrongs done by the Government...Sedition has become the creed of the Congress. Every non-cooperator is pledged to preach disaffection towards the Government established by law."

When Tagore ridiculed in an article, entitled *A Call of Truth* in *Modern Review* of October 1921, Gandhiji's philosophy of *Charkha*, he gave a straight reply, enlightening incidentally his countrymen on it. "To a people famishing and idle", Gandhiji wrote, "the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages...Hunger is the argument that is driving India to the spinning wheel...*Swaraj* has no meaning for the millions, if they do not know how to employ their enforced idleness. The attainment of *swaraj* is possible within a short time and it is possible only by the revival of the spinning wheel... A plea for the spinning wheel is a plea for recognising the dignity of labour. I claim that in losing the spinning wheel we lost our left lung." Justifying the bonfires of foreign cloth, Gandhiji told the poet, "I venture to suggest that the clothes I ask him to burn must be and are his... In burning my foreign clothes, I burn my shame. I must refuse to insult the naked by giving them clothes they do not need, instead of giving them work which they sorely need."

Clarifying the ambit of non-cooperation, Gandhiji underscored: "Our non-cooperation is neither with the English nor with West. Our non-cooperation is with the system the English have established in India, with the material civilization and its attendant greed and exploita-



tion of the weak. Our non-cooperation is a retirement within ourselves. Our non-cooperation is a refusal to co-operate with the English administrators on their own terms. We say to them: 'Come and co-operate with us on our terms, and it will be well for us, for you and the world'."

*Charkha*, Deshpande believed, was not unknown at any time in India. It was in use in many parts of the country. Gandhiji helped to rejuvenate this cottage industry. In Belgaum and Bijapur districts, *charkhas* were then being plied. Lingayat weavers were pledged to wear hand-woven cloth only. The *Charkha* was looked upon by them as sacred. Deshpande banked upon the people's sentiment to propagate *khadi* and popularise *Charkha* in the region. The soil was also fertile for cotton cultivation.

As part of the non-cooperation movement, Deshpande embarked upon a programme of picketing liquor shops in Belgaum.

On 1 July 1921, when a group of volunteers were picketing a liquor shop in Dharwar, the police resorted to firing, which resulted in the death of three persons. Painter, Collector of Dharwar, had resorted to oppression.

As the K.P.C.C. President, Deshpande rushed from Belgaum to Dharwar for an on-the-spot study of the situation. The dead were taken in a procession for burial; Deshpande was on the vanguard of it.

Later, Deshpande conferred with the local leaders on future course of action. Belvi from Belgaum was also present. A telegram was sent to government on the situation in the name of the Dharwar District Congress President, Vinayakrao Joshi. He was a retired Inspector of Education and had renounced the title of Rao Bahadur

responding to Gandhiji's call. A telegram was also sent to *The Bombay Chronicle*. The newspaper sent a representative to Dharwar for an on-the-spot study and report.

The police arrested some 27 Congress and Khilafat leaders and foisted a false case of arson and loot on them. Among those who were hauled up in court were R.R. Diwakar, Mudaveedu Krishna Rao, Mudaveedu Venkat Rao, Gopalrao Deshpande, Madhwarao Kabbur, Anantarao Dabde, Narayanarao Bhise, Hanumantrao Desai and Govindachar Guttal. Some Muslim leaders were also likewise proceeded against.

The Home Member of the Government of Bombay paid a visit and made inquiries. Obviously, his report was based on official version and the case was itself investigated by the Police Officer who was personally responsible for the firing.

Deshpande expected no justice. The accused refused to participate in the court proceedings beyond filing their statements. As expected, the accused were committed to the sessions for trial.

Gandhiji, in a message to the people of Dharwar on 14 July 1921, said:

"I have been following the doings of Government in Dharwar with the keenest interest. I tender my congratulations to the relatives of the victims of the official tyranny and I congratulate the people in general upon their patience and fortitude. It has given me great pleasure to learn that the arrests have not demoralized the citizens of Dharwar. I have no doubt that the incidents like the one at Dharwar will accelerate our march towards *swaraj* if only we retain our patience and the spirit of non-violence. Deliberate and intentional non-retaliation



doubles the courage of the people and adds greater sanctity to the cause they espouse. Undeterred, therefore, by the official repression, we must pursue our goal. I understand that the problem in Dharwar is complicated by local dissensions and feuds. I urge all to forget these in the face of the common danger but if all do not respond, I shall certainly expect non-cooperators to do so. But, quietly resigning themselves to whatever jealousies they may have been subjected to, they will disarm their opponents. There is no better remedy to overcome opposition than love and charity."

When a ban order was served on him and others against picketing in Belgaum Cantonment, Deshpande sought advice from Gandhiji. Gandhiji advised him to obey the order although he held the view that order was illegal. "They must obey it and that restraint would fit them for civil disobedience." Gandhiji thought that it was the duty of the liquor vendors to bow to the wishes of their countrymen. By closing their shops, they would help their country and what was good for the country was also good for them, he stressed.

At the A.I.C.C. meeting held at Bombay a few days later, Deshpande suggested that a committee of enquiry be set up by the Congress to ascertain the truth. Accordingly, a committee was appointed with Abbas Tyabji as chairman. On Deshpande's advice, Gandhiji sent Shaukat Ali and Lajpat Rai to meet the accused to encourage them to be brave and firm. Deshpande accompanied them. At Belgaum, they stayed for a day and addressed a public meeting. They met all the accused who were in Dharwar gaol custody. They were permitted to meet them but not to talk to them. Deshpande spoke for them, stressing that the Congress leaders at the national level were all behind them and they should be fearless in their conduct

in court. The accused felt immensely pleased and heartened.

Diwakar, Gopalrao Deshpande and Hanumantrao Desai were acquitted. Mudaveedu Krishna Rao was addressing a public meeting at Halyal, when there was the alleged rioting in Dharwar; the case against him had therefore, to be withdrawn. The other accused were convicted and sentenced to imprisonment from one to three years. Pension was stopped to Vinayakrao Joshi. A case of libel was filed against *The Bombay Chronicle* by Painter and some police officers, which ended in conviction. The Congress Committee of Enquiry gave its report, after recording evidence exhaustively, which declared unequivocally that the police firing was totally uncalled for.

While the sessions trial was in progress, a person met Deshpande and began to shed tears profusely. Srinivasarao Koujalgi from Bijapur was also present. Asked to explain, the person said that he had recently joined the Police Department as an officer and had been urged to depose falsely against Diwakar and others, who were known to him personally as free from any blame. He was inclined to resign from the Police Department in vindication of truth, he said and sought counsel. Both of them advised him to say the truth boldly and face the consequences. He could not, however, do so, as the need of bread and butter was stronger.

In 1921, Deshpande requested Gandhiji to tour Bijapur district, which he could not visit earlier as he went away abruptly to Sangli cutting short his schedule in Karnataka. Gandhiji readily agreed and undertook the tour. Deshpande accompanied him. Bagalkot was the first town he visited. Addressing a public meeting, where a sum of Rs. 1,000 was presented for the Tilak Swaraj Fund,



Gandhiji said that he wanted to collect one crore of rupees for the Fund and enrol one crore persons as Congress members. He wanted also 20 lakh *charkhas* plying in the country.

On his way to Bijapur from Bagalkot, Gandhiji noticed women labourers engaged in stone-cutting under the severe summer sun and felt greatly hurt. "Let them take to *khadi* work instead", he instantly commented.

It was evening when Gandhiji reached Bijapur. First, he addressed a ladies meeting; then, he addressed a public meeting at Tasbavadi grounds, attended by over 12,000. Addresses of welcome were presented to him on behalf of the Municipality and the business community. Replying jointly to them, Gandhiji referred to the non-Brahmin criticism of the Brahmin community for their advancement educationally, socially and otherwise. He observed that the Brahmins by and large had no doubt fallen from the high pedestal which they had once occupied as votaries of *Dharma* but they should endeavour to regain their lost prestige in society. Non-Brahmins had to learn a lot from them, who were still the leaders in society. They were also on the vanguard of the movement for the uplift of the backward classes. Lokmanya Tilak's services were too well-known for his iteration. The late Gokhale and Ranade had striven hard for the advancement of those classes. The Brahmin officialdom, he stressed, was not so blameworthy as the British rule of India. The British administrators were following a policy of divide and rule, whereas the Brahmins were holding positions of office in Government by virtue of their education and service. He urged non-Brahmin leaders to shed their hostility to Brahmins.

Gandhiji explained also the philosophy of *charkha*,

under-scoring that *charkha* was insurance against famine. When rains failed and drought conditions set in, he pointed out, spinning gave work and food.

Deshpande undertook later a vigorous tour, visiting important towns and cities in the region. He was able to secure promised contributions of over Rs. 44,000 to the Tilak Swaraj Fund, enrolment of over a lakh Congress members. He sent a sum of Rs. 11,000 to the A.I.C.C.

In June 1921, the Belgaum District Political Conference was held at Gokak. Srinivasrao Koujalgi of Bijapur presided. At the same venue, the Belgaum District Khilafat Conference was also held. The Ali brothers and Dr. Kitchlew were present. A moulvi from Simla had also come. The Khilafat Conference adopted a resolution of Muslim non-cooperation with the British rule of India; it also demanded republican status for India. Mohamed Ali himself moved the resolution.

Later, the Karachi Khilafat Conference, over which Mohamed Ali presided, adopted a specific resolution which was on the lines of the Gokak resolution. The Karachi resolution stated, "It is in every way religiously unlawful for the Muslims at the present moment to continue in the British army or to induce others to join the army, and it is the duty of all the Musalmans in general and Ulema in particular to see that religious commandments are brought home to every Muslim in the army, and if no settlement is arrived at before Christmas regarding our campaign, Indian republic will be declared at the Ahmedabad session of the Congress."

As a consequence of this resolution, the Ali brothers and Kitchlew were gaoled. Shankaracharya of Dwarka Peeth was also put in prison for an alleged disloyal statement.



Deshpande presided over the Ratnagiri District Political Conference, held at Chiplun in April 1921. Kalelkar and Karandikar editor of *Kesari* were among the leaders present. Some workers from Pune also attended.

In July, Deshpande presided over the Dharwar District Political Conference held at Navalgund. In his address, he strongly pleaded for direct action, reminding the audience that the time for debate had been long past. In enthusiasm for non-cooperation, he even hinted at the possibility of a no-tax campaign. He strongly criticised Collector Painter for his high-handed administration.

Deshpande attended the leaders' meeting held at Bombay on 4 October 1921. It had been convened by Gandhiji to consider the situation created by the arrest of the Ali brothers for the Karachi resolution. Among those present were Abul Kalam Azad, Ajmal Khan, Lajpat Rai, Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vitthalbhai Patel, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jayakar, Keskar, Sarojini Naidu, Abbas Tyabji, Jamnalal Bajaj, Aney, Ansari, Abdul Bari, Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad and others. A manifesto was issued which supported the Karachi resolution *in toto*. The manifesto declared:

“In view of the prosecution of the Ali brothers and others for the reasons stated in the Government of Bombay communique dated 15th September 1921, we, the undersigned, speaking in our individual capacity, desire to state that it is the inherent right of every one to express his opinion without restraint about the propriety of citizens offering their services to or remaining in the employ of the Government, whether in civil or the military department. We, the undersigned, state it as our opinion that it is contrary to national dignity for any Indian to serve as a civilian and more especially as a soldier, under a

system of governance, which has brought about India's economic, moral and political degradation and which has used the soldiery and the police for repressing national aspirations as for instance, at the Rowlatt Act agitation, and which has used the soldiery for crushing the liberty of the Arabs, the Egyptians, the Turks and other nations who have done no harm to India. We are also of the opinion that it is the duty of every Indian soldier and civilian to sever his connection with the Government and find some other means of livelihood."

On 5 October the Congress Working Committee at Bombay, adopted a resolution extending its full support to the manifesto. All over the country, meetings were held where the manifesto was read and adopted. The Government was shocked at the turn of events and tactfully adopted an attitude of indifference.

Deshpande saw Gandhiji for the first time in loin cloth at the Bombay meeting. A few days earlier, in September 1921, Gandhiji, while on tour in Tamilnadu, saw poor women cutting stone under the summer scorching sun and was overwhelmed with grief at the grinding poverty of our people. The sad spectacle as well as an incident at Madurai forced him to discard his scanty dress and take to the loin cloth in order to identify himself with the poor. At one of the meetings held at Tiruchirapalli (Trichinopoly) on 19 September Gandhiji explained, "In our climate, we hardly need to cover our bodies during the warm months of the year. Let there be no prudery about dress. India has never insisted on full covering of the body for the males as a test of culture." Justifying his wearing the loin cloth, Gandhiji observed, "I consider the renunciation to be necessary for me as a sign of mourning and a bare head and bare body is such a sign in my part of the country. That we are in mourning more and more



is being borne home to me as the end of the year is approaching and we are still without *swaraj*." On 21 September, he became a half-naked fakir at Madurai.

## 4

While at Bombay for the leaders' meeting, Deshpande came to know that the Government of Bombay had decided to prosecute him for sedition under section 124-A I.P.C. for his presidential address delivered at the Dharwar District Political Conference held at Navalgund. On learning of it, Gandhiji patted Deshpande and advised him to be brave.

From Bombay, Deshpande came to Pune and summoned Govindrao Yalgi to meet him there. Yalgi, on arrival, informed him that a warrant for his arrest had already been issued by the District Superintendent of Police. As he had to stay at Pune on personal work for 4-5 days, Deshpande, on advice from his host, Kelkar, sent a telegram to the District Superintendent of Police to wait for him. Yalgi, on return from Pune to Belgaum, met the officer to confirm the message. The District Superintendent of Police agreed to wait but took care to advise the Police at Pune to keep a close watch on Deshpande's movements and report. Police in mufti were posted at the residence of Kelkar. Deshpande addressed a public meeting before returning to Belgaum.

As he had not yet been chastened on the Gandhian anvil, Deshpande did not choose to enter Belgaum openly. He chose to go by car as surreptitiously as was possible. Accompanied by D.V. Gokhale, Phadnis and Pundalik, Deshpande left Pune by car which had earlier been procured from Satara. A car at Pune was not hired to hoodwink the police. When he reached Satara,

his friends, Karandikar, Soman and Athavale, were waiting to greet him. As the Dasara festival was then in progress, he was invited to partake of feast. After taking a heavy lunch at nine in the morning, he continued his journey. He met Shiralkar and friends near Karad. In the afternoon, he entered Kolhapur State through which the highway passes. He could very well have been harassed if the local police had detected him. He never wanted to get caught by the State Police, as they would have certainly illtreated him. The highway, luckily, does not pass through the city. But, the car in which he was travelling, by mistake of the driver, entered the city limits. The mistake was before long realised and the car soon turned to the Belgaum road. When the car reached Kagal in Kolhapur State, a Dasara procession had blocked the highway. The car had unavoidably to stop. Some passersby recognised Deshpande in the car and whispered among themselves, as the news of arrest warrant had already appeared in the press. The police were busy with the procession and the car managed to speed away. After a ten-mile journey, he entered the Belgaum district limits.

At Sankeswar, Yalgi reported to him the situation at Belgaum. After tea, he continued the journey. At eight in the night, he reached home to the joy of every family member. His mother had herself cooked the dinner for him. Quite a considerable number of his kith and kin had gathered to meet him on the eve of his arrest. After dinner, Yalgi conveyed the information of Deshpande's presence in Belgaum to the District Superintendent of Police who, in turn, instructed that Deshpande might be ready at about nine the next morning for courting arrest.

At the appointed time, Deshpande had finished his



bath and breakfast and was waiting for the police to take him into their custody. A Police Inspector appeared before him to conduct him to the District Superintendent of Police. At the bungalow of the District Superintendent of Police, the Assistant Superintendent of Police of Dharwar was waiting with a warrant of arrest. Deshpande was served with the warrant of arrest and taken in a car to Dharwar. Gokhale, Phadnis and Yalgi proceeded to Dharwar in another car. Deshpande was taken to the District Superintendent of Police and later committed to gaol.

Next day, Deshpande was produced before the First Class Magistrate. After recording the evidence of a few prosecution witnesses, Deshpande was committed to the Court of sessions for trial. Deshpande did not cross-examine any of the witnesses but only made a statement.

The sessions trial did not immediately commence. Some friends met him in gaol for which facilities had been provided by the Superintendent of the gaol, Reid and the gaoler, Wickham. Deshpande scanned the Naval-gund speech, and examined those portions of it, alleged to be seditious. He felt certain that his plea for no-tax campaign was very mild and innocuous, compared to the Ali brothers' Gokak call. When repeated at Karachi, they incurred the Government wrath; the case of sedition was, however, withdrawn as a tactical step. Deshpande wanted to show to the court that his speech was so inconsequential as not to attract section 124-A I.P.C. If he had not attacked Painter, he believed, he would not at all have been prosecuted.

Deshpande telegraphically requested the Government of Bombay to supply him a certified copy of the speech of the Ali brothers. Yalgi resented, as no defence was to

be contemplated according to the Gandhian plan of action. Deshpande, had, therefore, to feel contended with filing a written statement. He read it in court before signing. His classmate at the Deccan College, Katti, was the Government Pleader who conducted the case for the prosecution. He did not reply to the statement of the accused although he contended that the evidence tendered by the prosecution witnesses was sufficient to convict the accused. As both the assessors returned a verdict of not guilty, Judge Waterfield appeared to be in a fix; he postponed his judgement by a week. Taking into consideration the age of Deshpande, the Judge awarded him a sentence of six months' simple imprisonment.

Gandhiji congratulated Deshpande on his going to gaol. In a letter, which was read at a public meeting at Hubli by Dr. R.R. Diwakar on 15 October 1921, Gandhiji told Deshpande, "I hear that it is your turn now to have the good fortune of living in a jail palace. I envy your luck. You and others who go to jail add to the burden of those who remain outside. But, we will surrender all our worries to God. I am sure you will insist on having a spinning wheel in jail. Rest assured we shall not allow you to enjoy the pleasure of living in jail beyond the end of this year."

Later, on 17 November 1921, at a public meeting at Bombay, Gandhiji observed that the people were duty bound to do their work in a non-violent manner; so long as they believed in non-violence, *swadeshi* and Hindu-Muslim unity, they had no business to resort to violence. Then, they would not have any occasion to die. There was not much difference between life and death; in fact, they were one and the same. Until they were ready to die, they would not get *swaraj* and redress the Khilafat



and Punjab wrongs. Then only would they be able to set at liberty the Ali brothers and Gangadharrao Deshpande. Earlier, in a note to *Young India* of 20 October 1921, Gandhiji said, "The honours list is daily increasing. If we are renouncing one kind of titles from the Government, we are asking for another and true variety. Gangadharrao Deshpande is the latest selection. His name and the names of many I can think of convince me of the approaching victory. Only we must remain steady under the volley. If we continue to respond to the Government warrants without fuss, without noise and without anger, we may feel certain of immediate success. . . . If Karnataka is the country I have imagined it to be, Gangadharrao Deshpande's arrest and imprisonment must mean complete boycott of foreign cloth and much greater production of *khadi*. Karnataka cannot rest satisfied till by its own effort it has secured the freedom of imprisoned and still-to-be-imprisoned patriots. . . . Mr. Deshpande's unrivalled influence in Karnataka was also for peace. One would almost think that the Government of Bombay was ashamed of its own moderation and was trying to make up for past neglect. The Dharwar judgment . . . and the Karnataka arrests point to the fact that the Bombay Government is almost inviting people to violence. But, let us hope that it has become awakened too late for the purpose. The country seems to have understood which way lies its interest and will not play into the hands of the Government. . . . "

The day when the judgment was delivered, Dr. N.S. Hardikar was present in court. He had just then returned from the United States. He spoke to Deshpande as to others.

Deshpande was temporarily lodged in the Dharwar gaol. On the first day, he was given *roti and bhaji*, both

cooked in gaol. He could not eat them as he was totally unaccustomed. Next day, he was recommended supply of bread, milk, sugar, banana and cooked rice. After 10 days, he was taken by train to the Bijapur gaol. At every station, workers and admirers greeted him; especially at the Hubli, Gadag, Bagalkot and Bijapur stations, crowds were indeed unmanageable.

The gaol at Bijapur was just a choultry of the Bada-shahi days. He was kept in a small room, infested with bugs and ants. On complaint, the room was given a white-wash. One day, when the Inspector-General of Prisons, Jackson, visited the gaol, Deshpande asked for the supply of *The Times of India* newspaper. His request was granted readily. He was also supplied with some books and stationery. He requested that his room might not be locked also, but the authorities could not oblige him for security reasons.

In the same gaol, Damodar Ganesh Savarkar had also been lodged. He had been kept in solitary confinement. Deshpande openly grieved that Savarkar had been given an inhuman treatment for his patriotism. When he learnt Savarkar was sick also, Deshpande's grief knew no bounds.

After about a month, Deshpande was removed to the Yervada prison. *En route*, he had to halt briefly at Hutgi for the train from Madras. The train was carrying a large number of delegates to the Ahmedabad Congress. Many of them recognised Deshpande, who was in *khadi* dress with cap on, and cheered him. When Deshpande reached the Yervada prison gate in the evening, it had been locked. After a wait for half an hour, he was taken inside the gaol and shown his room. He was not given a bed and had to manage with what he was wearing and what



he was given by a jail-warder who took pity on him. The next day, being Sunday, no officer visited the gaol; he had to spend the day without facilities. The Superintendent of the gaol was so strict that he denied even the food that had been prescribed at Bijapur; he told Deshpande bluntly that the gaol was not the Taj Mahal Hotel. Although the room was well ventilated there was no separate latrine; a pot had been kept in a corner to serve that purpose.

Deshpande learnt later that he had to be transferred from Bijapur to accommodate Mohamed Ali there.

The Congress session at Ahmedabad, held in December 1921, was presided over by Hakim Ajmal Khan, as the President-elect, C.R. Das, had not yet been released from jail. 4,762 delegates attended it as against 14,583 at Nagpur. The reason for the thin attendance was that many thousands of Congressmen were still rotting in jails all over the country. Yet, the visitors exceeded two lakhs. Vallabhbhai Patel, as the Chairman of the Reception Committee, had constructed a khadinagar and over 2,000 *khadi-clad* valunteers looked after the arrangements.

At the session there were some leaders who advocated a policy of 'hasten slowly'. Malaviya moved a resolution for a round-table conference. It was rejected by a huge majority. Maulana Hazrat Mohani wanted a change in the plan of action. He was hooted out by the delegates who were indignant at the continuing incarceration of many thousands of co-workers.

Gandhiji underscored: "Think 50 times before you take a step which may redound not to your credit, not to your advantage, but which may cause irreparable injury. Let us first of all gather up our strength. Let us

first of all sound our own depth. Let us not go into waters whose depth we do not know. Our creeds are not such simple things like clothes which a man changes at will and put on at will. They are creeds for which people die, for which people live for ages and ages. Ours is an extensive creed. It takes in the weakest and the strongest.”

The Congress Session supported the leadership of Gandhiji for civil disobedience. It called for the continuance of public meetings, violating prohibitory orders, and mass arrests everywhere.

Taking note of the possibility of Government's repressive measures to put down the agitation, the Congress appointed Gandhiji as the dictator.

When Deshpande was languishing in jail, a few Congressmen from Karnataka who had been proceeded against under sec. 108 Cr. P.C. and sentenced to suffer imprisonment for one year each were brought to Yervada. Among them were Dattopant R. Majli and Keshavarao Gokhale, of Belgaum, and Krishnarao Mudavedkar and R.R. Diwakar of Dharwar, and Hanumanthrao Koujalgi of Bijapur. Initially, they had been huddled in a room but a few days later each of them was kept separated from the rest.

At the Ahmedabad Congress, Deshpande was included in the Working Committee as a member but Srinivasa-rao Koujalgi was appointed to deputise for him in his absence at the Session there.

Armed with the Congress mandate, Gandhiji decided to lead the people of Bardoli to launch the civil disobedience movement. The Congress Working Committee, meeting at Surat on 31 January 1922, empowered him to do so. Gandhiji sent an ultimatum to the Viceroy and



the latter replied justifying his repressive measures. When preparations were afoot for launching the campaign, on 5 February, 22 constables were burnt alive in the police thana at Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh by a mob infuriated at the police firing resorted to earlier in the day. Gandhiji was shocked at the outbreak of this ghastly violence by the people. He imposed on himself a five-day purificatory fast. "When India claims to be non-violent and hopes to mount the throne of liberty through non-violent means," Gandhiji declared, "mob violence even in answer to grave provocation is a bad augury. Non-violent attainment of self-government presupposes a non-violent control over the violent elements in the country. Non-violent non-cooperators can only succeed when they have succeeded in attaining control over the hooligans of India, in other words, when the latter have also learnt patriotically or religiously to refrain from their violent activities at least while the campaign of non-cooperation is going on." After deep introspection, Gandhiji cried halt to the movement which, of course, angered the rank and file of Congressmen, most of whom were in prison, everywhere. Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lajpat Rai and other leaders were all shocked. Gandhiji counselled patience to them all, telling them that their sacrifices would not go in vain. "There is no waste of energy, there is no destruction in this. Even a little of this *dharma* saves one from many a pitfall," he observed in a letter to Jawaharlal.

Deshpande followed closely what was happening outside with such information as he could obtain. One day, at the end of March 1922, he and other prisoners were all locked up in their respective cells in the afternoon, much ahead of the usual time. He came to know later

that both Gandhiji and Banker had been brought there for imprisonment. They had been convicted for sedition. Gandhiji had been sentenced to six years imprisonment and Banker to one year.

Deshpande's health in gaol was gradually deteriorating due to bad food. His liver went out of order. He lost 15 pounds in weight. The gaol doctor examined him and prescribed some medicines. He took several vitamin injections. While going to the gaol hospital on alternate days, he used to pass through the barrack where Gandhiji had been lodged. He used to see him from a distance and offer namaskar which the latter duly acknowledged.

One day, all the political prisoners, including Gandhiji, Banker and Deshpande were summoned to meet the Gaol Superintendent. They all waited outside his office. Deshpande who was sitting close to Gandhiji asked him why he called off the Bardoli Satyagraha. His action, Deshpande remarked, had caused profound disappointment and resentment amongst Congress rank and file generally. With him were some other Karnataka leaders including R.R. Diwakar, Srinivasrao Koujalgi and Hanumanthrao Koujalgi. They had been kept together in the European ward; Major Jones, the Superintendent, had taken care to see that they did not mix up with the ordinary prisoners and inculcate in them a spirit of patriotism. They had earlier discussed the matter amongst themselves and decided to confront Gandhiji himself with the question. In reply, Gandhiji told them that the Chauri Chaura incident was justification enough for imposing a military rule on the country. If it had happened, the country would have gone back by at least 30 years politically as the mass awakening which had been roused during the



one year of the non-cooperation movement would have been totally destroyed.

There was no time for discussion. Some minutes later, the prisoners were individually produced before the Superintendent who elicited information about the cases against them.

One day, Kelkar and Gokhale interviewed Deshpande in gaol. They had brought some books for him, but were refused permission.

Deshpande was behind the bars, when the interview took place and felt greatly hurt at this humiliation. He borrowed books from the gaol library and read them during the five months he was there. He was released in May 1922. Before release, he was moved to Belgaum. *En route*, at Satara, Karad and Miraj railway stations, he was greeted by people who recognised him. He was brought from the gaol at 2 a.m. to his residence, where he was set at liberty. Quite a good number of co-workers, besides a large number of members of his family, had gathered to welcome him. His mother had just then returned from a pilgrimage which she had started soon after his entry into gaol.

## VIII

# The Belgaum Congress Eve

### 1

AFTER RELEASE from gaol, Deshpande asked himself what his future course of political action was. He conferred with local leaders to gauge public opinion. Among them were Govindrao Yalgi, Babasaheb Soman and Srinivasarao Koujalgi. Most of Tilak's close associates, excepting Khadilkar, had opposed the Gandhian plan of non-cooperation. Among them were Kelkar and Gokhale. Although political differences were not at any time unusual, Deshpande felt distressed at leaders on either side indulging in mutual mud-slinging. The local workers, however, urged him to give a lead. After participating in a public reception accorded to him, Kurtukoti Shankarcharya presiding, Deshpande went to Pune, in response to a telegraphic summons from Kelkar who had stated that M.S. Aney, B.S. Moonje and other leaders were anxious to exchange their views with him there.

At Pune, Deshpande met M.S. Aney first as the latter had urgently to go to Yeotmal. Aney feared of a split in rank and file of the Nationalist Party and advised him to assess the situation carefully and then take appropriate decision. Deshpande conferred later with Kelkar and Gokhale. He was given a reception at a meeting over which Kelkar presided. He was unable to announce his future programme of work, as consultations were yet incomplete.



Deshpande went next to Bombay, summoned telegraphically by Dr. Bhadkamkar who was then playing a leading role in the Mulsi satyagraha. He was accorded, on arrival at the station, a reception by Senapati Bapat on behalf of the Mulsi Satyagraha Mandal. A reception was held in his honour at the Marwadi Vidyalaya grounds with Khadilkar presiding. He announced at the meeting his full support to the non-cooperation movement, although he was quite conscious of incurring displeasure from quite a good number of his hitherto close associates in Maharashtra, prominent among whom was Kelkar. He was fortified in his decision by the thought that Tilak had not expressly opposed the Gandhian programme of action. He had indeed leaned towards Gandhiji when Tilak was alive. When Gandhiji and other leaders including Nehrus and Das were behind prison bars, he did not like to criticise the Congress programme openly. He preferred to wait for their release to exchange views with them. He noted, however, with considerable distress that the movement for national freedom had suffered a set-back in Maharashtra due to political schism particularly in the provincial Congress leadership.

To mobilise public support for the Mulsi Satyagraha, which Senapati Bapat was spear-heading, a conference was organised at Bombay. Deshpande was requested to preside but he politely declined the honour as he could not totally approve of Senapati's understanding of the Gandhian technique. Dr. Moonje presided over the Conference, while Deshpande was formally present. Consequent to the resolution adopted at the Conference, the *satyagraha* got intensified. Volunteers as well as funds from Karnataka were sent.

In May 1922, Motilal Nehru was released from gaol. Meetings of the Congress Working Committee as well as

of the A.I.C.C. were held at Lucknow soon after. Deshpande decided to attend both. At Bombay, he stayed with Jamnalal Bajaj where he met C. Rajagopalachari. It was his first meeting with Rajagopalachari. All the three leaders mutually exchanged their views frankly on the situation. Deshpande was at once struck with admiration by the astute intellect of Rajagopalachari. His association with Rajagopalachari grew closer as days passed. The three leaders together travelled by train to Lucknow. They had decided to confer with Motilal Nehru before formulating their decision.

After release, Motilal Nehru arrived at Lucknow to a tumultuous welcome. The leaders, including Deshpande, met him; they told him that there was need to set up a committee to tour the country to assess the people's preparedness for direct non-violent action. At the meetings, this proposal secured support. Accordingly, a committee consisting, among others, of Hakim Ajmal Khan, Ansari, Motilal Nehru, Vitthalbhai Patel, Shervani, Rajagopalachari and Kasturi Ranga Iyengar, was formed with the support both of those who desired a change and those who did not. Those, who wanted a change, expected the committee to report that the country was yet unprepared for the Gandhian programme of action, while those others expected that the committee's tour would give a fresh fillip to the movement. The wordy duel between Changers and No-changers which started then went on unabated till the Belgaum Congress of 1924.

Deshpande believed that there was no need for the setting up of the committee at all, as the country was well represented at the A.I.C.C. itself. Leading Congress representatives of public opinion everywhere in the country were, he contended, the members of the Committee. After they had expressed their views, where was a fresh



need to gauge the public opinion, he asked. He realised that Vitthalbhai Patel was eager for council entry, while Rajagopalachari led the No-changer group.

When the Committee visited Pune, Deshpande happened to be present there. It heard the views of Kelkar, Bhapatkar, etc. which favoured a change in the Congress programme. Chintamanrao Vaidya and others spoke for the No-changers. Members of the Committee were, however, eager to gather evidence in support of their respective, but conflicting, view-points.

Deshpande rushed to Bijapur where the Committee was next scheduled to meet the Karnataka leaders. He was there to greet as the K.P.C.C. President when the Committee arrived. Belvi, President of the Belgaum D.C.C., and Srinivasarao Koujalgi, Vice-President of the K.P.C.C., spoke as Changers, while all other leaders spoke firmly as No-changers.

Deshpande informed the Committee that the situation was quite favourable for launching a no-tax campaign in Karwar District. Vitthalbhai Patel cross-examined him closely to prove him wrong but was not successful. To a question from Rajagopalachari, he affirmed that the situation at Karwar was on the whole favourable for such a campaign.

Jagannathrao Samant of Sholapur desired to tender evidence at Bijapur as he could not visit Pune when the Committee was there. He was permitted to do so by Hakim Ajmal Khan only after ascertaining from Deshpande that he was a No-changer.

At Bijapur, members of the Committee addressed a public meeting. Motilal Nehru was absent as he had to return to Allahabad from Pune in response to a telegram

that his daughter-in-law, Kamala Nehru, was suddenly taken ill.

When the report was signed, Deshpande came to know to his unpleasant surprise that both Hakim Ajmal Khan and Motilal Nehru were on the side of Pro-changers, contrary to their earlier proclaimed stance.

The civil disobedience movement was considered by the Committee as 'impractical for the present' and half the number of its members explicitly recommended its abandonment, besides suggesting the formation of a new party within Congress for council entry.

A few days later Srinivasarao Koujalgi of Bijapur was prosecuted under Section 108 Cr. P.C.

When the case was being heard, Koujalgi and Deshpande were engaged in an endeavour to pacify the ruffled feelings of both Brahmin and Lingayat communities at Athani in Belgaum district over a matter of little political significance. But those communities were so emotionally surcharged that they had resorted to violence at times and had gone to court finally. The issue was about the relative greatness of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. The story goes that Sage Vyasa had once declared with his uplifted right hand that Lord Vishnu was superior to Lord Shiva; enraged by this declaration, Nandi cut off the sage's uplifted hand; subsequently, the sage withdrew his declaration, whereupon the cut-off hand was restored to him. The animus, this nonsensical story had generated between the two communities, had adversely affected their joint participation in the freedom struggle. Both the Congress leaders argued earnestly with the leaders of either community to bring home to them the absurdity of their parochial outlook and at last won.



Koujalgi was sentenced to one year's simple imprisonment. Deshpande was present in court and assured him that his suffering would not be in vain.

The A.I.C.C. met at Calcutta to consider the report of the Committee on the issues raised by Pro-changers and No-changers. Paradoxical as it may seem, Das and Motilal had gone to gaol but both of them had now stood for council entry. In the Congress Working Committee, opinion was divided, although the members had not gone apart so far as to split the organisation itself. Deshpande stood firmly as a No-changer, so also were Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel and Konda Venkatappiah. Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Bihar were solidly behind the No-changers.

Opinion in Maharashtra was, however, sharply divided. A Committee had been set up to compose differences; Deshpande, Aney, Kelkar, Khadilkar, Vaidya and Paranjpe were its members. The Committee met but could not resolve the crisis. Kelkar offered to follow Deshpande's advice; he offered to sign on a blank paper for him. Of course, Deshpande would not have accepted it. Later, Kelkar, made an issue of it in *Kesari* which hurt Deshpande deeply. Deshpande was also distressed at the capture of several Congress Committees in Maharashtra by those who had stoutly opposed the resolution adopted at the Plenary session of that great organisation.

The A.I.C.C., after prolonged debate extending to 5-6 days, recommended that the report be placed before the Gaya Session of the Congress, which was scheduled to be held at the end of 1922.

A complaint was, in the meantime, lodged with the Congress Working Committee that the recently-held party elections in Central Provinces were unconstitutional. A

committee was set up to go into the matter. Deshpande and Sen Gupta were its members. While Deshpande was a No-changer, Sen Gupta was a Pro-changer. They were not able to agree to give a unanimous report. Sen Gupta unilaterally gave a report upholding the elections already held as constitutional. When Deshpande came to know of it, he protested against the one-sided report. A decision was ultimately taken at the highest level favouring fresh elections.

A battle of wits was witnessed at the Gaya Congress Session. C.R. Das, in his presidential address, strongly advocated council entry and wanted Congressmen to return in majority in the Council to oppose Government measures. Motilal Nehru and Vitthalbhai Patel were behind him. Deshpande felt bewildered whether there was at all a leader amongst No-changers who could stand up to them. There rose to his great satisfaction Rajagopalachari, who moved a resolution for council boycott and argued his case quite convincingly. His resolution was passed by 1740 votes to 890. The session thus favoured the continuance of the non-cooperation movement. Rajagopalachari, in his speech, earlier, suggested that those who would suffer defeat, might as well form a separate party to carry on their activity exclusively.

The Pro-changers could not take their defeat lying down. They formed the Swaraj Party with C.R. Das as President and Motilal Nehru as Secretary to carry on their activity on 1 January 1923. The Swaraj Party, on its formation, declared that it wanted to remain within the Congress-fold "believing that the Gaya programme is not conducive to the speedy attainment of *Swaraj*".

To review the situation afresh, A.I.C.C. met at Allahabad. Deshpande stayed at Anand Bhawan with Motilal



Nehru. After an acrimonious debate at the meeting, the decision was postponed. The A.I.C.C. met soon again at Bombay, which adopted a resolution requesting all those, who were opposed to council entry, to refrain from indulging in the tactics of obstruction. Accordingly Deshpande, Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel, Konda Venkatappiah and Rajendra Prasad resigned from the membership of the Working Committee.

As this resolution was inconsistent with the resolution passed at the plenary Gaya Congress Session, Deshpande felt that he should start an agitation to secure annulment of the change. He conferred with Rajagopalachari on the matter. Both of them came to the conclusion that the PCCs were free to carry on the mandate given by the plenary session, notwithstanding the revised stand of the A.I.C.C. Deshpande soon summoned a meeting of the K.P.C.C. at Dharwar. Rajagopalachari was himself present. Deshpande moved a resolution in support of the Gaya resolution, which was passed unanimously. Later, some other PCCs followed suit.

At the A.I.C.C. meeting in May 1923, matters came to such a climax that C.R. Das had to resign from the Congress Presidentship. Deshpande welcomed the change, as he contended that those who opposed the officially-declared Congress Policy should not be office-bearers of the party at any level; he wanted like-minded leaders alone to be in the Congress Working Committee so that the work of the Party could go on without any hitch.

So far as Karnataka was concerned, Deshpande as K.P.C.C. President as well as C.W.C. member, took care to see that the Swarajists got no foot-hold at all. He felt gratified that Karnataka was behind him in this hour of the Party crisis.

Dr. Ansari became the new Congress President, while Jawaharlal Nehru was chosen as its General Secretary.

Meanwhile, Deshpande suffered a profound personal loss in the death of Govindrao Yalgi who had stood by him through thick and thin for a very long time. He died of tuberculosis at Gadag. Later, several members of the Yalgi family participated in the freedom struggle and suffered imprisonment. For the success of the Belgaum Congress Session in 1924 also, they worked shoulder to shoulder with Deshpande who was the Chairman of the reception committee.

When the A.I.C.C. met next at Nagpur, matters again came to the boiling point. At the meeting, the P.C.Cs. which had worked against its latest resolution were taken to task. A resolution seeking to censure them was hotly debated, stirring up the emotions of members present. It was, however, defeated. Those members of the Working Committee including the President, who were in favour of council entry, immediately resigned, whereupon those No-changers including Deshpande who had earlier resigned, returned. For the Presidentship of the Congress, an election was held between Deshpande and Konda Venkatappiah in which the latter succeeded.

At Nagpur on 1 May 1923, the flag *satyagraha* was started under the leadership of Jamnalal Bajaj. Vallabh-bhai Patel was in full charge of it. The *satyagraha* was offered in violation of the order prohibiting the carrying of the Congress flag in the Civil Lines of the City. About 2,000 volunteers from different parts of the country participated in it. Karnataka was represented by Dr. N.S. Hardikar apart from some volunteers from Bangalore. Deshpande was, of course, present. He addressed public meetings at Nagpur; so did Rajagopalachari and Rajendra



Prasad. The agitation ended successfully on 18 August when the Government allowed a procession with the Congress flag to proceed in the Civil Lines without interference.

The next Congress Session was held at Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh. Mohamed Ali, who was in gaol at Bijapur, was elected President. He was soon released. Deshpande met him at the Bijapur railway station. Mohamed Ali was in a prisoner's uniform, while a copy of Koran was hanging from his neck. He appeared pulled down in health. He embraced Deshpande with tears of joy in his eyes. He was glad to learn that he was to preside over the next Congress session. Deshpande requested him to visit Bijapur again to address the Provincial Conference which was scheduled to be held shortly.

A few days later, Srinivasarao Koujalgi was released from gaol. Deshpande received him at the gate.

Srinivasarao Koujalgi, as the Chairman of the reception committee, organised the Provincial Conference. Rajagopalachari, who presided, supporting the boycott of council, indicated that the future course of action centered on the directive which would be given by the next Congress President who was present in their midst.

Mohamed Ali did not mince words when he declared that they had all to stand by Gandhiji and there was no alternative but to intensify the movement. After Gandhiji was released they could secure his counsel and decide on the next step towards freedom, he added.

A special Congress session was held at Delhi. Abdul Kalam Azad presided. He had just then been released from prison. In his presidential address, Azad indicated his preference for council entry to the chagrin of No-

changers. Rajagopalachari was not present. Deshpande and other no-change leaders conferred with Mohamed Ali. The discussion resulted in an assurance of the stand taken up by Mohamed Ali against council entry. The very next day, Mohamed Ali, changed his stand surprisingly. He even pleaded fervently with No-changers not to dissuade those who conscientiously favoured the council entry. A telegram was sent to Rajagopalachari for advice. He tactfully advised the No-changers to accept the leadership of Mohamed Ali. Deshpande and other no-change leaders conferred amongst themselves and came to the conclusion that they should no more question the patriotism of the pro-changers. Konda Venkatappiah in particular felt that they had stabbed Gandhiji in the back; Deshpande could see tears rolling down his cheeks.

Mohamed Ali himself placed the resolution for withdrawal of ban on council entry. It was passed. Deshpande surmised that Mohamed Ali's support was born out of his anxiety to prevent a desertion of the Congress by the Swarajists. Deshpande believed also that the Council entry programme would eventually prove futile, although its protagonists claimed to expose in the Councils the hollowness of the claim of the alien rulers to be responsive to the will of the people. No-changers, in consequence, evinced little interest in council elections, Deshpande, however, was persuaded to take interest in the election of Dalvi, a non-Brahmin leader, to one of the two seats from the Belgaum district. His support was guided by the thought that a pronounced pro-Government candidate should not be returned.

Consequent to the council-entry controversy, Jamnalal Bajaj set up an organisation called the Gandhi Seva Sangha exclusively to provide a forum to No-changers to engage themselves wholeheartedly in the carrying out of



the constructive programme. The members of its executive were, besides Bajaj, Gangadharrao Deshpande, Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajagopalachari and Vallabhbhai Patel. The organisation was, however, dubbed by its opponents as political and clashed with the Swaraj Party.

Pursuant to the mandate issued by the Delhi Congress session, the Swarajists headed by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru went into action with enthusiasm and speed everywhere in the country. They were able to capture a majority of seats in several provincial legislatures and a near-majority of seats in the Central Assembly. The Das-Nehru combination was a remarkable success. If Das was a great orator, Nehru was a great organiser. "Between the two, there was absolute confidence, so much so that each had authorised the other to use his name for any statement, even without previous reference or consultation," as Tendulkar points out in his biography of Gandhiji.

## 2

At Kakinada Congress session, Mohamed Ali as President, paid a glowing tribute to Gandhiji when he told the delegates, "The only one who can lead you is the one who had led you at Amritsar, at Calcutta, at Nagpur and at Ahmedabad, though each session of the Congress had its own elected President. Our generalissimo is a prisoner of war in the hands of the enemy, and none can fill the void that his absence from our midst has caused. Self-purification through suffering, a moral preparation for the responsibilities of Government, self-discipline as the condition precedent to *swaraj* was the Mahatma's creed and conviction. And those of us, who have been privileged to have lived in the glorious year that culminated in the Congress session at Ahmedabad, have seen what a rapid

change he wrought in the thoughts, feelings and actions of such large masses of mankind.”

Some delegates sought to raise the question which had earlier been settled at Delhi. Pandit Sundarlal, Gowrishankar Misra and Shyamsundar Chakravarthi, among others, expected support from the delegates from Karnataka who were present in good strength. Mohamad Ali asked Deshpande to speak. He wanted Deshpande to address specially the delegates of his region. Deshpande spoke in Kannada. It was the first ever speech made in Kannada in plenary Congress session. Deshpande spoke for about 20 minutes, which had the desired effect.

The Congress session adopted a compromise resolution inasmuch as it permitted the Swarajists to enter the councils as well as urged the people to carry out the constructive programme as preparation for launching a civil disobedience movement later. The resolution was moved by C. Rajagopalachari and seconded by C.R. Das.

Mohamed Ali as Congress President appointed Deshpande as one of the Secretaries of the organisation, the others being Jawaharlal Nehru and Kitchlew. Deshpande gave his consent after consulting the Karnataka delegates. Such consultation was necessary to maintain unity within the rank and file of the Congress party in Karnataka.

When the Subjects Committee took up the issue of holding the next Congress session, Deshpande extended invitation on behalf of Karnataka. Invitations were extended from one or two other provinces also. Mohamed Ali preferred Karnataka and the Congress accepted the invitation, on a resolution moved by Srinivasarao Kouj-



algi of Bijapur. The selection of the venue was left to the Pradesh Congress Committee itself to decide.

A few days after the Congress session, Deshpande visited Bijapur. At an informal meeting of prominent citizens held at Srinivasarao Koujalgi's residence, Deshpande was urged to support the claim of Bijapur as the venue. Deshpande declined to commit himself as suggested; he told the meeting that the Pradesh Congress Committee would soon meet and take a decision. He felt aggrieved as Koujalgi had not spoken to him earlier about the matter. Koujalgi's silence was ominous.

Deshpande summoned in due time the Pradesh Congress Committee to meet at Hubli. He felt that Belgaum was an ideal venue for the Congress Session as the political atmosphere then prevailing there was quite favourable to it, for the non-Brahmin feeling was at its lowest. He had visited some important non-Brahmin centres and secured their total support. The Muslim population was also in his favour. The businessmen of both Belgaum and Sholapur had assured him substantial financial support. Fifty bungalows in the new extension of Thalakwadi (Tilakwadi) were also available for lodging. A temporary railway station had been promised to be opened at Thalakwadi. As Bhimrao Potdar, D.C.C. Secretary was also the Chairman of the Municipal Administrative Committee, there was no difficulty in securing municipal assistance. Deshpande hoped to tap Jamnalal Bajal also if any financial emergency arose. He consulted the local members of the Pradesh Congress Committee, who, without exception, backed his proposal. However, only 12 out of 26 attended the meeting at Hubli.

At Hubli, the situation was not as visualised by Deshpande. Mangalore Congressmen were stoutly in favour

of organising the Congress session in their region. They did not want to enter into any prior consultations with Congress members of other regions. When they were so adamant, others also wanted to be equally rigid. Deshpande felt himself to be in wilderness. He felt that the Congress High Command could itself have decided the venue, but the ball now was in the court of the provincial committee and there was no possibility of going back.

Deshpande presided over the meeting. The President of the Pradesh Congress Committee explained the agenda. He made a special appeal for dispassionate discussion. Karnad Sadasivarao, President of the South Kanara District Congress Committee, moved a proposition that the session be held in South Kanara, while Hanumanth-rao Koujalgi moved thereafter a proposition suggesting Bijapur as the venue. Dharwad was also similarly favoured by another proposition. Deshpande himself suggested Belgaum and explained the facilities available there. Debate was inconclusive when the meeting adjourned for the day.

At night prolonged informal discussions were held between the leaders and their followers but no decision could be arrived at.

The morning session of the second day meeting also ended in heated discussion. In the afternoon session, however, Deshpande made an earnest appeal to members to a decision before they rose. Srinivasarao Koujalgi offered privately Chairmanship of the reception committee to Deshpande if the latter withdrew his claim for Belgaum. Deshpande resented the bait. When the propositions were put to vote, Belgaum secured the highest support. The meeting concluded but some members felt dissatisfied with the decision.



After returning to Belgaum, Deshpande and his associates addressed themselves to preparations.

In the midst of these preparations came a stunning report that Gandhiji had been admitted to Sassoon Hospital at Pune for appendicitis operation on 11 January 1924. A later report said that Gandhiji was operated upon for acute appendicitis on the night of 12 January. Deshpande sped to Pune at once and stayed there till Gandhiji was able to move about. Rt. Hon. K.S. Srinivasa Sastri was the first to break the news of Gandhiji's illness and operation. At 10 at night of 12 January, Gandhiji was put on the operation table. When operation was in progress, a thunderstorm cut off electricity. The torch, which a nurse was holding, also failed. The operation was finished with the light from a hurricane lantern. The operation went on for one hour. Gandhiji was released on 5 February. He was not happy at his release due to illness; "such a release can bring me no joy, for I hold that the illness of a prisoner affords no ground for his release."

Gandhiji, from his sick bed, wrote on 9 March 1924, to Deshpande that he had received a full report about Majli. "What an unfortunate incident! It is part of the sacrifice we had to make for the realisation of our objective. Whether we get intestinal trouble or go insane, we should not be afraid of going to gaol. Even without going to gaol some of us suffer from insanity and some others of us suffer from intestinal disorder.

"Now, let us consider the facts of the unfortunate incident. If Majli is in fit condition to travel, either you or Soman shall bring him to me. As I am taking a cook to the coastal region, a cook is to be sent with him. Although I do not invite guests, I do invite those who are sick like

me; if they stay with me, I feel glad. I feel rather ashamed to go to sea-resort. How many sick can command comforts which I am having? Hence, if co-workers who are likewise sick stay with me, I feel a little consoled. If Majli could get mentally all right by staying with me, what a pleasure it would be for me! Let him not, therefore, feel even for a moment disinclined to come on the plea that he would be a burden to me. What you have to see is his fitness to travel."

When Deshpande returned to Belgaum, he came to know that South Kanara Congressmen had alleged that the Hubli decision was not tenable legally and had demanded that the issue should be reconsidered. Deshpande wrote to Sadasivarao not to attempt to reopen the issue which had already been settled. The result was a letter signed by several Congress members of Mangalore urging for a meeting of the Pradesh Committee for fresh consideration of the subject. Deshpande was in a quandary as preparatory work had already started at Belgaum. He could have ignored the request but did not do so in order to avoid schism within the rank and file of Congressmen in Karnataka. Sadasivarao took the matter to Gandhiji who advised that unless there was a manifest irregularity in the procedure adopted, the issue could not be reopened.

Gandhiji wrote to Deshpande on 23 March 1924, "I read a paragraph in the *Mahratta* saying that the Mangalore people are still disputing the resolution of the Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee fixing the Congress venue at Belgaum. Is it a fact and, if it is, please give me some details and tell me also, whether I can help in any way? You may also give me the names of parties who are agitating for a reversal of the Committee's decision." In another letter dated 5 April 1924, to Mr. Gokarn, Gandhi-



ji assured, "I want to do all I can to prevent a prolongation of the dispute."

A second meeting of the Provincial Congress Committee was held a few days later and it unambiguously reiterated its earlier decision. There were quite a good number of members who resented openly at the reopening of an already settled matter.

Gandhiji expressed his joy in a note to *Young India* of 24 April 1924 at the amicable settlement. The note said: "The Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee has met and amicably settled its differences about the venue. The resolution admits defective election procedure and then confirms the former decision to hold the Congress at Belgaum. I tender my congratulations to the Committee on having performed a purificatory act. To err is human only when we are ready to admit errors. Persistence in error after discovery is very much less than human." Gandhiji urged the committee to show the highest record of constructive work so as to enable it to offer civil disobedience. He also pleaded for solving the Brahmin and non-Brahmin problem which was then prevailing. He asked, "If Karnataka was India, can she shoulder the burden of full self-Government with Brahmins and non-Brahmins distrusting each other?" "The only way to solve the knotty problem," he underscored, "is for each party to regard the interest of the other as its own. Then, the knot is unloosed without effort. If the volunteers and workers vie with one another in serving, if the Brahmin, bends to the non-Brahmin and *vice versa*, they will clothe the whole of Karnataka in *khadi*."

Gandhiji advised Deshpande to steel his heart against adverse attacks. In a letter to him dated 21 July 1924, Gandhiji observed, "I am converting a news letter into a

love letter! To the attacks made against you in the Marathi Press, I felt like replying through *Young India*. I thought what I write might kick up more dust. You may yourself see the lines which I have struck off. Hence, my plea to you is literally to kiss the leg which kicks you, don't harbour ill-will towards those who insult you. It is our opponents who teach us patience and restraint, it is they who activate our dormant spirit of love. People love those who love them. But, love is tested when we love those who are inimical to us. I trust you will not take serious note of the allegations made against you. I advise you to love constructively those who swear against you. Let this letter give you the courage required.

"Let me know what action you have taken about the court case.

"You may not agree with me on the decision I have taken on the issue of the Congress Presidentship. After prolonged consideration I felt I should be fully free to act as I may desire. When I feel the time opportune, I should be free to retire from activity. If in such circumstance, I am the Congress President, it will not be possible for me to retire. If the country is with us, whether or not I am the Congress President, it shall be possible for us to carry out its policy."

Returning from Hubli, Deshpande addressed himself whole-heartedly to the task of reception arrangements for the 39th Congress session. At the first meeting of the reception committee, Deshpande was himself elected to be the Chairman. Belvi, who was his senior in age and service, preferred to be a Vice-Chairman. Srinivasarao Koujalgi agreed to be another Vice-Chairman. Madhwarao Kumbhavi, Bhimarao Potdar and Babasaheb Soman chose to work as secretaries. Several sub-committees were set



up to be in charge of different arrangements. Dr. N.S. Hardikar was in command of the volunteer corps. As work progressed, all sections of the people actively co-operated with Deshpande, keeping aside differences of every hue which had hitherto dogged them. No work was given away on contract as Deshpande insisted that contractors were no more than mercenaries. He wanted that every work should be done by those who wanted to render national service. He wanted also that utmost economy in expenditure should be practised.

The Congressnagar sprang up consistent with the plan of the new lay-out for the Thalakwadi extension. Timber and bamboo were secured direct from the nearby forests. An appeal for funds was also issued. On seeing it, Vallabhbhai inquired of Deshpande whether he needed external contributions. Deshpande politely informed him that local contributions, which were bountiful, would suffice.

When Deshpande was thus in the midst of breath-taking preparations, he was invited to preside over the Maharashtra Provincial Conference at Jalgaon. Shankararao Deo urged him to accept the invitation. Deshpande agreed but wondered what should be his stand on the council-entry issue. He met Gandhiji who was convalescing at Juhu in Bombay and sought his counsel. Gandhiji told him that he had himself not formulated his firm opinion on it and advised him, in consequence, not to refer to it in his Presidential address. At Jalgaon, Deshpande was asked to make his stand unambiguous on it by both the Patel brothers, Vitthalbhai and Vallabhbhai. Deshpande, was however, cautious enough to avoid any split amongst Congressmen assembled at the Conference. He stated merely that Gandhiji Would, after his sojourn at Juhu, show the direction.

The local Patedar Community presented a welcome address to the Patel brothers. They expressed mutually conflicting views on the council-entry issue to the amusement of their listeners.

The A.I.C.C. met at Ahmedabad on 27 June 1924. It was important as Gandhiji unfolded his Swaraj Plan. Deshpande was especially concerned as the meeting was expected to review the immediate past and take firm decision on future course of action.

Gandhiji had tabled four propositions on compulsory spinning for Congressmen, carrying out of instructions at subordinate Congress levels, adherence to five boycotts of mill-spun cloth, law courts, schools, titles and legislative bodies, and condemnation of political murder. In an appeal to A.I.C.C. members, Gandhiji affirmed his firm belief in Khaddar for Swaraj. "I believe in the spinning wheel," he said and went on, 'it has two aspects, terrible and benign. In its terrible aspect, it is calculated to bring about the only boycott we need for independent national existence, viz., that of foreign cloth. It alone can kill the demoralizing British self-interest. In its benign aspect, it gives a new life and hope to the villagers. It can fill millions of hungry mouths. It alone can bring us in touch and in tune with the villagers. It is the very best popular education that is needed for the millions. It is life-giving. . . To be truly national the Congress must devote itself exclusively to that which will bring the nation most quickly within reach of *swaraj*. Because I believe in the potency of *khaddar* to give *swaraj*, I have given it the foremost place in our programme."

Gandhiji's propositions were cleared for A.I.C.C. consideration at the Working Committee meeting held on the eve of the Session. The A.I.C.C. considered the pro-



positions threadbare. Swarajists opposed them in *toto*. In particular, Swarajists objected to the spinning clause as they held the view that A.I.C.C. was not competent to amend the Constitution. Gandhiji, of course, cared little for hair-splitting arguments. Motilal Nehru characterised Gandhiji's action as autocratic. He made a statement and walked out. He was followed by Das, Srinivasa Iyengar and many others. In their absence the resolution was passed. Later, Swarajists had a heart-to-heart talk with Gandhiji and compromise resolutions were passed. Thereupon, Gandhiji declared himself as defeated and humbled.

A resolution which was of particular importance to Deshpande, was on Congressmen's participation in court proceedings. The meeting reiterated the Nagpur resolution. Dr. Choitram Gidvani, on a point of order, submitted that it was *ultra vires* of the boycott resolution already passed. Mohamed Ali, Congress President, asked Gandhiji whether the objection was valid. Gandhiji had to reply in the affirmative. As the proposition was ruled out, Gandhiji sank within himself. To him the discussion was wholly unreal.

Deshpande went up to Gandhiji and asked him whether he should resign from the Working Committee. Gandhiji advised him to do so. Deshpande promptly tendered his resignation. The President read it to the meeting and it was immediately accepted.

In an article, Gandhiji explained the scope of protection which the resolution sought to give to Congressmen on Court cases. He stated that protection was intended for those who might be driven to courts either as plaintiffs or defendants. Gandhiji had himself moved the resolution. In the course of his speech, Gandhiji had said that Gangadharrao Deshpande was an instance. Gandhiji stressed, "I do not believe in exemptions and 'as far as

possible'. But I know that some of the strongest non-cooperators have found it difficult to avoid law courts. Unscrupulous debtors have refused payment to non-cooperators because of their knowledge that the latter could not sue them. Similarly, I know men who brought suits against non-cooperators because they would not defend themselves." After the resolution was rejected, Gandhiji wrote, "Gangadharrao asked me whether he should resign. I agreed with him that he should do so at once. And, he promptly tendered his resignation. The President read it to the meeting. It was accepted almost unanimously. Gangadharrao was the gainer."

Later, Gandhiji observed, "When the A.I.C.C. rejected the resolution exempting litigants, Mr. Gangadharrao Deshpande immediately tendered his resignation which was accepted as soon as tendered. Mr. Deshpande happened to be the General Secretary of the Congress. He is also Chairman of the Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee. It will be interesting to learn how the difficulty in Karnataka is to be overcome, seeing that Mr. Deshpande is the moving spirit. He is organising the next Congress work in Karnataka."

Gandhiji proceeded, "Mr. Gangadharrao's case is a very big experiment. If he is able to guide the people under his influence without occupying any office, he will have set an example for all of us to copy. It is necessary for us to bring into being workers who would want no office and yet would render an effective service as the strongest official. Such men and women are the pride of the nation. They are its reserve force."

Deshpande, later, resigned from the A.I.C.C. as well as the P.C.C. He also tendered resignation from the Chairmanship of the Reception Committee of the Cong-



ress session. This resignation was not, however, accepted as the reception arrangements were held to be outside politics. Deshpande accepted the verdict and carried on.

A number of office-bearers of the Provincial Congress Committee at Hubli tendered their resignations pursuant to the A.I.C.C. resolution. Commenting, Gandhiji wrote in *Navjivan*,

“By taking this needed step of handing their resignations, they have proved their worth and have purified the Committee. And yet the public will not be deprived of their services. If they have resigned out of anger, they stand to lose, because they are likely to forfeit the love of the people which they have earned. But, from what I hear, all of them have resigned with goodwill. The public will continue to be served by them. The good example that Shri Gangadharrao Deshpande has set not only to Karnataka but also to the whole of India, an example which makes up hope that it will be followed by all those who have resigned and yet continue to serve the public. . . . Those who continue as office-bearers in the Congress even though they cannot comply with its resolutions deceive the public and themselves too.”

A few days after the A.I.C.C. session, Hindu-Muslim disturbances broke out in several parts of the country. The immediate cause was said to be the publication of a scurrilous attack on the Prophet by a Hindu. Gandhiji was so upset that he went on a 21-day fast at Delhi for restoration of communal harmony. In Delhi too, when Gandhiji was fasting, alas, riots broke out. Deshpande did not have high hopes about the outcome of the fast. Mohamed Ali decided to convene an all-party unity conference to restore communal harmony and peace and summoned Deshpande to Delhi to help him. He went there and met

Gandhiji also. He spoke to him for 5-6 minutes. The all-party meet was held and pious resolutions were passed. Deshpande believed that it was an exercise in futility.

After Gandhiji terminated the fast on 8 October, the Congress Working Committee met at Patna. It set up the All-India Spinners' Association. Gandhiji himself offered to be its President. A trust was also formed. Deshpande was appointed its Agent for Karnataka. He was also appointed a trustee along with C. Rajagopalachari some time later.



## IX

# Charkha for Swaraj

### 1

GANDHIJI WAS the President of the Belgaum Congress Session, held in December 1924. It was the only Congress session over which he ever presided. The session was most business-like and organisational efficiency was at its top.

Deshpande had made a personal request to Gandhiji to preside over the Belgaum session when he was at Ahmedabad to attend the Spinners' Association meeting, held a few days after Gandhiji returned from Patna. By then, some Provincial Congress Committees had also nominated him for the honour. Gandhiji did not straight-away accept the nomination; he wanted time to consider.

At Bombay, the All-Parties Conference was held to promote communal harmony. Several non-Brahmin leaders were also present. Sir Dinshaw Petit presided over the first-day session. Next day, Rt. Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri was in the chair. All those who spoke helped to restore Hindu-Muslim accord everywhere in the country. The Conference was followed by a session of the A.I.C.C., and it adopted Gandhiji's proposals.

Gandhiji felt pleased and decided to lead the Congress at Belgaum. If he had declined, Sarojini Naidu would probably have presided. Gandhiji's acceptance gave a fillip to reception organisation at Belgaum. Congress

workers as well as a large number of others, inspired with patriotic fervour, from different parts of Karnataka, converged at Belgaum to see that the session turned out to be a magnificent success. Reception arrangements began to be carried out with utmost efficiency.

For the session, a huge tent from Kakinada was secured. It was the tent whereat the previous Congress session was held. As local workers were unable to pitch the tent aright, an expert from Calcutta had to be summoned. When he demanded very high charges, Deshpande requested C.R. Das, who was present at the Bombay Conference, to intervene. Das telegraphically told the tent expert : "Deshpande saw me. Accept Belgaum work. I am responsible for your charges." The tent expert rushed to Belgaum and carried out the task assigned to him quickly and satisfactorily. He accepted such remuneration as was given to him.

Deshpande toured parts of Karnataka for fund-raising. He received the expected support from all districts except South Kanara. Some districts including Bellary and Karwar were generous far beyond expectations. In Karwar, poor people contributed in terms of annas which totalled to several thousands of rupees. This district played later a magnificent role in the No-Tax campaign. The then princely State of Mysore did not lag behind. The Maharaja's Government had itself participated in the Congress Exhibition. Royal garments of exquisite workmanship had been sent to it from the Palace. Court musicians of national repute including Veena Seshanna gave recitals which received high encomium from Congress leaders and delegates alike. Gandhiji was himself present at Veena Seshanna's performance for over 90 minutes.

A meeting of the Reception Committee, held at Bel-



gaum, formerly chose and invited Gandhiji to preside over the session. All those who attended the meeting supported the proposition and the only exception was Belvi on the ground that Gandhiji was yet politically immature. Belvi's vote was cast for Sarojini's nomination. Of course, Belvi later regretted openly.

The venue of the Congress Session was named Vijayanagar, which revived the memory of the glorious rule of Krishnadevaraya and others. The newly-formed roads were called after the names of great historical personages of Karnataka. The entrance to the tent was beautified with a tower which was a replica of the tower of Hampi Virupaksha Temple.

Deshpande addressed letters to all the members of the Reception Committee for their active and full co-operation. Many of them heartily responded and shouldered responsibility. Some others, however, adopted a negative attitude; they revelled in criticism of whatever was done. After the first meeting of the Reception Committee, Deshpande decided not to convene further meetings of it but to concentrate on execution of work with such active assistance as he could muster. General Secretary Madhwarao Kembhavi stood by him as no one else with his quiet efficiency. Hanumanthrao Koujalgi was in charge of the exhibition, while Krishnarao Yalgi looked after miscellaneous work. When some members of the Reception Committee complained that power had been concentrated in a few hands, Deshpande felt hurt as they were finding fault with workers instead of extending co-operation to them. He brushed it aside in view of the onerous and urgent tasks which had to be performed. He advised also those who had stood by him not to heed the unmerited criticism of their work from whomsoever it emerged. At a meeting of the entertainments committee,

when musicians from Maharashtra, in addition to old Mysore, were sought to be invited, the Chairman of the committee alleged partisanship against Deshpande himself. Of course, Deshpande felt annoyed. He felt that the plea that only Karnataka musicians should be invited was parochial. There was heated discussion for over 150 minutes. Deshpande walked out of the meeting in disgust. Later, he took special care to see that no differences of opinion on any matter came to surface at any level to hinder the progress of reception work.

Dr. N.S. Hardikar was the chief commandant of the Volunteer Corps. He had organised the Hindustani Seva Dal the previous year and it formed the nucleus for the Congress Seva Dal. Kaka Kalelkar, deputed by Gandhiji, ably supervised the work everywhere. He was particularly interested in sanitation. A temporary hospital was also established but it had little work to do, which pleased Gandhiji. Kitchen was manned exclusively under the direct control of the reception committee. The famous Belgaum butter and ghee were served aplenty. Curd from Sangli was daily brought in huge cans. Over 200 lady volunteers were in charge of the kitchen. Servers came from Kagwad, Ganeshwadi, Miraj and Sangli. Vessels had been lent by Belgaum shop-keepers. A separate hall had been put up for spinners, to whom about 150 wheels had been supplied.

A special hut had been erected for Gandhiji. It had been beautified. The cost of the hut was Rs. 350/-. After the Session, the materials used for the hut were sold for Rs. 250/-. Deshpande reported it to Gandhiji when he met some time later to remove his erroneous impression of wasteful expenditure. The Municipality and the District Local Board extended total co-operation. They looked after cleanliness in Congressnagar. The revenue and



police departments of Government also extended every possible assistance. The Railway authorities had opened a temporary station at Thalakwadi. Drums for water storage were lent by the railway authority without charge. A huge well was dug up for water supply. It was named Pampa Sarovara. It soon filled to capacity. The Cantonment well got dried up and a demand was made that the Congress well be closed. An engineer from Bombay came to Belgaum and examined the position. He was satisfied that the source of supply of water to the Congress well was quite different from that of the Cantonment well. After the Congress session concluded, the well was given over to the Municipality which strengthened it and beautified the area. Even today, the well stands as a monument to the Congress session. A memorial plaque has also been put up.

After the Congress Session had concluded, all the materials used were sold away as a result of which 60 per cent of the investment was realised. The closing balance of Rs. 30,000 was given over to the Provincial Congress Committee. This amount sustained Congress work in Karnataka for over five years.

Deshpande as the Chairman of the Reception Committee went about on horse-back to supervise the arrangements. He had brought the horse from Hudli his native village. He provided a strange but pleasing spectacle inasmuch as it was not then in vogue for an old man riding and being so active as Deshpande was. Rajendra Prasad remarked, "Old Gangadharrao Deshpande moved about on horse-back like a young man and supervised the work." In his autobiography, Prasad also observed, "The people of Belgaum showed great enthusiasm. Our usual *khadi* exhibition was also organised but there was a new feature this time — a music conference in which Karna-

taka's famous artistes took part. The Mysore Government extended its co-operation by sending the Durbar musicians to the Conference."

A few days before the Congress met, the Government embarked upon a policy of repression vis-a-vis the *Swarajists*. The Government of Bengal promulgated an ordinance, whereunder indiscriminate arrests and searches of residences were carried out, which angered the whole of India. Subhas Chandra Bose, who was then the Chief Executive Officer of the Calcutta Corporation and the right-hand man of C.R. Das, was among those imprisoned. Gandhiji, as the authentic voice of India, acknowledged gratefully the sufferings of people in Bengal for the national cause. "To the Bengalis who are on trial," he said, "if you are innocent as I believe most of you are, your incarceration can only do good to the country and yourselves, if you will take it in the right spirit. We will not win freedom without sufferings." He called upon those who believed in violence to confess and suffer the consequences; "thereby you will prove your courage and honesty and save many innocent persons from involuntary suffering".

The Congress session commenced on 26 December at Belgaum. Advised by Gandhiji, Deshpande welcomed the delegates in a very brief seven-minute speech. Copies of his printed speech had been supplied earlier to delegates. Copies of Gandhiji's presidential address were also likewise supplied to them. Besides, these copies were sold and a sum of Rs. 1,000 was realised therefrom.

Gandhiji, addressing the delegates extempore, stressed that the *charkha* would bring them *swaraj*. "I am convinced that *swaraj* cannot come so long as the tens of millions of our brothers and sisters do not take to the



*charkha*, do not spin, do not make *khadi* and wear it." On India's political goal, he preferred a federation of friendly interdependent states to complete independence. "If the British Government mean what they say and honestly help us to equality, it would be a greater triumph than a complete severance of the British connection. I would, therefore, strive for *swaraj* within the empire, but I would not hesitate to sever all connections, if severance became a necessity through Britain's own fault. I would thus throw the burden of separation on the British people."

Gandhiji advising suspension of non-cooperation movement, felt that the nation was not then ready for it. Yet, as an individual, he clung to it as it was an article of faith with him. "Non-cooperation and civil disobedience are but different branches of the same tree of *satyagraha*. It is my Kalpadrum, Jam-I-Jam, the Universal Provider. *Satyagraha* is search for truth and God is truth. *Swaraj* for me is part of the Truth. I cannot and will not hate Englishmen. Nor will I bear their yoke. I must fight unto death the unholy attempt to impose British methods and British institutions on India. But, I combat the attempt with non-violence." He maintained that *satyagraha* never failed and one perfect *satyagrahi* was enough to vindicate Truth.

The pact resolution was adopted by 116 to 19 votes before the session for the day concluded.

The next day, a resolution deploring the Gulbarga riots was passed. A resolution on drink and opium traffic said : "The Congress is of the opinion that the policy of the Government of India in using the drink and drug habit of the people as a source of revenue is detrimental to the moral welfare of the people and would, therefore, welcome its abolition." It also urged that opium cultivation

be restricted to medical and scientific purposes. The Congress constitution was amended to provide for spinning franchise.

On 27 December, Dr. Annie Besant addressed the session. She had come especially to oppose the compromise formula. On alighting from the train, she inquired of Deshpande, who was present at the station to receive her, whether the resolution was still under discussion. When told that it had already been passed, she thought of returning straightaway. She was, however, persuaded to stay on and address the delegates.

Gandhiji decided to conclude the session the same day, one day ahead of the schedule. He asked Deshpande whether he wanted the session to be held on the third day also. Realising the implication of the question, Deshpande replied in the negative. He was not in favour of sitting in order to earn. Accordingly, the session concluded on 27 December.

True to tradition, some conferences of special interest, as adjuncts to the Congress session, were held at the same venue. One such was the Students' Conference. Gandhiji, addressing the gathering, urged them to practise Swadeshi and wear khaddar. He emphasised, "*Khaddar* is not a symbol of hatred of anybody but it is a symbol of love and self-dependence."

At the Anti-untouchability Conference, Gandhiji observed, "I have declared times without number from various public platforms that it is the prayer of my heart that if I should fail to obtain *MOKSHA* in this very birth, I might be born a Bhangi in my next. I believe in *VAR-NASHRAMA* both according to birth and *karma*. But I do not regard Bhangis and in any sense of a low order." He declared that untouchability had no sanction of Hin-



duism. Untouchability was removable as uncleanness. He did not advocate inter-dining and inter-marriage as essential to the removal of untouchability. He affirmed that Hinduism had committed a great sin in giving sanction to this evil and he was anxious to purify it of that sin by expiating for it in his own person.

A Cow-protection Conference was also held. Presiding over it, Gandhiji said that *swaraj* would be meaningless 'so long as we have not found out a way of saving the cow'. A distinguishing feature of Hinduism, he observed, was belief in cow-protection and reverence for the cow. He noted that Muslims claimed that Islam permitted them to kill the cow. "To make a Mussalman to abstain from cow-killing under compulsion would amount to converting him to Hinduism by force. Even under *swaraj*, it would be for a Hindu majority unwise and improper to coerce a Mussalman minority into submission to statutory prohibition of cow-slaughter." He pleaded for non-violent conversion, endeavour to win over our opponents by love. He wanted cow-slaughter abolished the world over.

In January 1925, Gandhiji wrote two articles in *Young India*, giving his Belgaum impressions which were in part very critical. He observed :

"Gangadharrao Deshpande and his band of workers rose to the highest height. His Vijayanagar was a triumph — not yet of *Swaraj* — but certainly of organization. Every detail was well thought out. Dr. Hardikar's volunteers were smart and attentive. The roads were broad and well kept. They could easily be made broader for the convenience of the temporary shops and the easy movement of thousands of sight-seers. The lighting arrangement was perfect. The huge pavilion with a mar-

ble fountain in front of it seemed to invite all who would enter it. The capacity of the pavilion could not have been less than 17,000. The sanitary arrangements, though quite good, needed still more scientific treatment than what they had. The method of the disposal of used water was very primitive. . . .

“Whilst I am able to give ungrudging praise for the almost perfect organisation that one could see in the Congress camp, I cannot help remarking that Gangadharrao could not escape the temptation of making the outside look lavish and in following the traditional custom of going in for extravagant luxuries for the people at the top. Take the Presidential ‘hut’. I had bargained for a *khaddar* hut, but I was insulted with a *khaddar* palace. The floor space reserved for the President was certainly quite necessary. The fence round the ‘palace’ was an absolute necessity for my protection from embarrassingly admiring crowds. But I am sure, that, had I been the contractor, I would have given the same space and the same comfort to the President at half the expense. . . The refreshments supplied to the members of the Subjects Committee and others were unnecessarily lavish. There was no sense of proportion observed as to the quantities served, The extravagance came from a generous heart. It was all well meant. Forty years’ tradition, cannot be undone in a day . . . Let us remember that the Congress is intended to represent the poorest toilers (who are the salt of India. Our scale must be so far as possible adjusted to theirs. We must be, therefore, progressively economical without being inefficient and stingy.”

Mahadev Desai also paid a high tribute to the organising capacity of Deshpande. He recorded in his diary, “One can only think of Belgaum as a holy place of pilgrimage. Its atmosphere is saturated with the devout



love of Sri Gangadharrao Deshpande; it is charged with the spirit of adoration of his assistants, the volunteers, who know the value of discipline and obedience; it is permeated with non-violence, which Gandhiji's presence is spreading into it in every action that is taken; and definitely for the purpose of manifesting this non-violence to perfection, the big congregation has gathered here. If a place like this cannot be called a holy land, I would like to know what other name might be given to it. It is difficult to put down in language the exhilaration and love of Gangadharrao. It shows he is having the superb experience of 'to-day is my life's aim fulfilled'. That day has, at least, dawned on him which he was dreaming of for many days past. He does not seem to be worried at all as to what may happen at the Belgaum Congress. Full of happiness at the arrival of that auspicious event, when Belgaum's atmosphere is being purified by the exclusive influence of Gandhiji's thought and action for a whole week, he is seen riding here, there and everywhere to supervise everything. This is a sight which cannot fail to inspire the spirit of youth in anybody who sees him. Pages would have to be filled up to describe with full justice the enthusiasm with which he has done his work and the meticulous care he has bestowed on the comfort of his guests. He had thought of putting up Gandhiji in a stately palace, but gave up the idea on the ground that Gandhiji himself might not like it, and had constructed instead a beautiful khadi kutir. And why should he make any special arrangements for his own friends and colleagues — Vallabhbhai, Rajendra Prasad, Shankarlal, Reva Shankar and such others — who have come to Belgaum to share with him his joys and sorrows? They are put up with him in a separate small house. He had thought of putting his own mother in charge of the kitchen there, but an equally self-effacing colleague, Sri

Soman said, 'No, my sister will look after the kitchen'. Rajagopalachari and his friends are, therefore, entrusted to the care of this aged sister of Sri Soman. For Mrs. Sarojini Naidu a special arrangement has been made as it should have been. Spacious beautiful bungalows have been provided for the distinguished guests, Dr. Annie Besant, Mr. C. R. Das and Pandit Motilal Nehru. As for the Maulanas, would the Khilafat committee let go its claim over them? And there is so much affinity here between Hindu and Muslim leaders, that a tussle is out of question. Kakasaheb Kalelkar is the head of the conservancy department and he is keeping everything, including latrines, clean for the common man. And it is also he who has arranged for a group of singers under the leadership of a local saint, Purandar Vithal, to sing hymns to the hundreds of men who gather in front of Gandhi Kutir."

Later, Mahadev Desai dealt with the first-rate organisation made for the Congress. He stated :

"It was excellent enough to satisfy the most fastidious. Except for the fact that the red earth of the ground dyed everybody's clothes in the ascetic's *bhagwa*, there was hardly anything else to complain of. Sri Gangadharrao's figure inevitably met the eye as he passed from tent to tent to see that everything was in perfect order. The volunteers were most courteous and disciplined. The rule to keep left was not allowed to be broken even during peak-hours, when thousands had gathered in the premises. In the sanitation department, 80 volunteers under Kakasaheb's leadership helped those scavengers of the municipality who were drafted there. It is specially noteworthy that a large majority of these volunteer sweepers and scavengers have come from the Brahmin caste. There was a spinning pandal where spinning-wheels were pro-



vided for those who wanted to spin. Is it necessary to say after all this that Khadi was visible everywhere and always? The sanitation department worked with excellent efficiency right up to almost the last day. It would have been much better if the Khilafat Committee had not made it a point to engage Muslim volunteers only. What a good effect it would have created, if Hindu volunteers were seen serving Muslim delegates! Gangadharrao had spared no pains in giving the place a most charming look. The gopur (tower) standing with its array of lights in front of the big Congress pandal and the soothing fountain erected inside the gopur did not fail to catch Gandhiji's eye. Gandhiji thinks that beauty is beauty only to the extent that it serves the interests of the masses and helps in national progress. He, therefore, admonished Gangadharrao for erecting the khadi kutir where he was put up. 'I am a bania all over and would see that not a pie is wasted. They say I am provided with a cottage entirely made of khadi. But it must have cost not less than Rs. 2,000. But the delegates, poormen, have to stay under common roofs. They are not free from the sun's unpleasant attention and, I am sure, they must be shivering with cold at night. And what a big amount they have to pay for even those few comforts! Am I then wrong when I say, it is at their cost that I am provided with this lordly palace?' Despite this comment, I think that if Gandhiji had visited the common dining hall, he would have excused the rather high charge for the meals there. Everything about it was clean and tidy. Green leaves of banana, washed and rubbed clean, served as plates, while its dried leaves were stitched up into cups. There was nothing wanting in the neatness of the place where on low seats the diners squatted and beautiful designs around their seats added a charm. Within these designs the exhortation in Kannada 'Spin, brothers, spin, that the

country's poverty may take flight', was written in beautiful Kannada characters. Besides a large number of cooks, there were 300 servers — and everyone of them was a volunteer! In South India, people volunteer their services for such work and all of them belong to respectable families."

After the reception committee of the Congress had been wound up, Deshpande decided to engage himself in *khadi* work at Hudli. He was no swarajist and his was not council work.

It was known that Srinivasarao Koujalgi was a staunch supporter of council entry, while Deshpande was not. Gandhiji invited both of them to sit on his either side and, looking at their respective warring followers, said, "In Karnataka, on the same soil, have grown two trees. One does not allow the other to grow to its full stature. So, shall we cut off one or both? Well differences are not personal."

Deshpande, intervening, said, "You know very well I am, from the beginning, interested in constructive work."

Koujalgi then said, "This is a political question. Just because I support the stand of Pandit Motilal Nehru, should I be dubbed as a traitor?"

Gandhiji remarked that Motilal and Das had chosen a path which had appeared to them to be correct. They had also extended their support to constructive programme. It was the duty of constructive workers to support them.

## 2

When, in 1925, Gandhiji founded the All-India Spinners' Association and the All-India Village Industries Association, Deshpande was appointed their representa-



tive in Karnataka. He worked earnestly in that capacity for several years. He reported on the work and sought instructions from Gandhiji from time to time.

To one of his letters, Gandhiji replied counselling adherence to the fundamental principles rather than tinker with the problems at the periphery. Gandhiji in his letter of 27 July 1926, from Sabarmati wrote, "I have received your letter detailing your activity. I discern in it both your optimism and pessimism. If our experiments are strictly in conformity with the fundamental principles of our objective, there is no cause even for an iota of despair.

"As the poor have lost interest in living altogether, indolence is deep-rooted in them. If we work amidst them for a sufficiently long period of time, they may begin to show interest in life. If we are sure that our programme solves their problems, we shall wait for ages for full results. We alter our programmes because of our lack of faith and patience and we do not allow our activity to take firm roots.

"There are two reasons why weavers are disinclined to use hand-spun yarn. The hand-spun yarn is not as strong as the mill-yarn and they are not satisfied about the durability of the cloth woven of hand-spun yarn. In due course, they will get interested. We should try to improve the quality of the hand-spun yarn. We should enthruse the spinners to spin better and better. We should examine their spinning-wheels and remove defects noticed. We should enable them to spin yarn of finer counts with great speed. There is need to improve the spinning-wheel.

"I am experimenting on improvement of yarn. We in the ashram are trying experiments fortnightly. Reform is startling. I am thinking of publishing statistics.

“I shall use the material you have supplied in the columns of *Young India* as far as possible. See the tables in this week’s edition. I want information as per the tables. I want to prepare the tables as comprehensive as possible in order to get as much information as possible.”

Commenting upon a report from Deshpande, Gandhiji replied on 5 August 1926, reverting to the same matter, “The problem of inducing paid spinners to improve their yarn and weavers to take up hand-spun yarn is causing difficulty everywhere. Patience and perseverance combined with acquisition of scientific knowledge about the methods of improving hand-spun yarn is the only remedy. Weavers will readily take up hand-spun yarn if it is even, strong and hanked. They have no time for thinking of patriotism, all of their time being used up in keeping the wolf away from the door. They, therefore, seek the easiest work. And, unless we make weaving of hand-spun yarn as easy as that of mill-yarn, we must not expect many weavers to take it up. The secret, therefore, lies in hand-spun yarn being improved in quality. And, this is only possible, when we have an army of expert voluntary spinners who know all about spinning, who know a good spinning-wheel from a bad one and who, having love for the semi-starved spinners, will go to them, patiently reason with them and finally steal into their hearts so as to induce the spinners to make the necessary improvement in their wheels and understand the method of drawing finer, strong and more even yarn. The thing is difficult. It is not impossible. But, the difficulty of the task and the extent it covers make it a matter of first class national importance. And, as it admits of immediate returns and, therefore, its accomplishment is within reach, it does not need unlimited capital.”

Earlier, on 2 June 1926, Deshpande caused the open-



ing of the khadi vastralaya at Fort in Bangalore City. It was to commemorate the 43rd birthday of the then Ruler of Mysore, His Highness Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, who was a great supporter of the khadi movement. Karpur Srinivasa Rao, the then Chief Engineer of the State, presided. Deshpande, in his welcome address, reviewed the progress of khadi work in Karnataka, expressing special gratitude to the Mysore State Administration for its encouragement. C. Rajagopalachari also spoke, explaining the need for propagation of *khadi* in the country. Later, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Konda Venkatappayya and Shankarlal Banker visited the vastralaya and lauded its effort to popularise *khadi*.

Gandhiji toured Karnataka to give an impetus to *khadi* work in 1927. It was organised by Deshpande. Gandhiji underscored that it was not a pleasure trip but a business tour during which he expected substantial business for his principal, *Daridranarayan*. He insisted upon utmost economy in tour expenditure.

To a query, Gandhiji replied, after conferring with Deshpande, that the demand that collections made in a particular region or State should be spent in that region or State only was untenable. Gulbarga collections, for instance, might well be spent elsewhere in the country, he observed.

When Gandhiji arrived at Nipani, town of Belgaum district at the northern tip of Karnataka, bordering the Maharashtra State, in the last week of March, he had an attack of apoplexy. He stayed there for four days. After treatment, he was advised complete rest for quite some time. Before leaving Nipani, a meeting was held to enable Gandhiji to give darshan to the people who were so anxious about his health. Gandhiji sat in a chair, while

Deshpande spoke. A purse was presented to Gandhiji, who whispered thanks. The assembly then dispersed quietly.

Gandhiji proceeded to Nandi Hills, about 36 miles north of Bangalore, for recuperation and rest. Deshpande accompanied and stayed on to attend on him. C. Rajagopalachari was also present.

When the rains started, Gandhiji moved to Bangalore. As his physical condition improved, there was daily a stream of visitors. They were regulated by Deshpande and Rajagopalachari. In a letter dated 19 June 1927, to Rev. C.F. Andrews, Gandhiji remarked, "As it is, Rajagopalachari and Gangadharrao are the gatekeepers. I see very little of them. They put in their appearance only to bring visitors and take them out. I know nothing about their trials and their attempt to shield me. As Rajagopalachari himself has written in his latest story, illness of rich men or great men have a charm and romance all their own. One needs to be really a pauper to understand the chastening effects of illness."

After he was physically fit, Gandhiji resumed the tour of Karnataka. He was accompanied by Deshpande who translated his speeches into Kannada. Rajagopalachari was also with him.

On 3 July 1927, Gandhiji opened a *khadi* exhibition in Bangalore, organized by Deshpande, assisted by Rajagopalachari. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was present at the inaugural function. The Mysore Government had lent its support, besides sanctioning a grant of Rs. 500. Government-manufactured charkhas were also on view. One model was unveiled by Gandhiji himself.



After Deshpande spoke, welcoming the gathering, Gandhiji spoke. He prefaced his speech by saying, "If *khadi* makes no appeal to your reason and has no place in national economy, it must be suppressed in spite of my weakness for it. In great national causes, personal affections must be discounted as disturbing factors."

After explaining the need for promotion of *khadi*, Gandhiji hoped that the exhibition would enable visitors to appreciate the 'priceless' value of *khadi* as a central fact in village organization, and concluded, "May it induce you to establish between yourselves and the poor villagers a living bond by adopting *khadi* for your dress and house-hold use."

## An Ideal Satyagrahi

### 1

DESHPANDE WAS in the vanguard of the Salt Satyagraha and subsequent campaigns, launched by Gandhiji for the freedom of the country. He implicitly carried out the instructions given to him from time to time. He was an ideal Satyagrahi.

When the All-Parties Conference demanded dominion status for India, the Government treated it with scant courtesy. In consequence, the Lahore Congress, under the stewardship of Jawaharlal Nehru, held in December 1929, demanded complete independence. On 26 January 1930, the whole nation took the solemn Independence Pledge and expressed its readiness to sacrifice everything for its realisation.

Gandhiji began to think seriously about the next step in implementing the pledge. After discussions with his colleagues and co-workers, Gandhiji ultimately decided to launch Salt Satyagraha, though it was symbolic of India's protest against the foreign rule.

Gandhiji himself led the first batch of 78 satyagrahis. He started his trek of 241 miles from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad to Dandi on the sea-shore on 12 March 1930. "Today, the pilgrim marches onward on his long trek. Staff in hand, he goes along the dusty roads of Guj-



arat, clear-eyed and firm of step, with his faithful band trudging along behind him," described Jawaharlal Nehru.

In the meanwhile, in Karnataka, Dr. R.R. Diwakar, convalescing from an operation for appendicitis at the end of 1929, had been elected as the President of the Provincial Congress Committee. A Satyagraha Committee was formed to conduct the movement. Deshpande was naturally the most prominent member of the Committee. It was decided that Ankola, a town close to sea shore in North Kanara district, should be the venue of a camp of volunteers to be trained for not only Salt Satyagraha but for the whole campaign which would follow it. Dr. N.S. Hardikar, the Founder of the Hindustani Seva Dal, was in overall charge, while veteran workers like Hanumanthrao Koujalgi and Shamrao Shenoy were actively engaged in the organisational work of the camp. In order that the intending satyagrahis may reach Ankola before the fateful day of launching universal breaking of the Salt Law on 6 April 1930, a big procession of the people of Hubli led by Dr. R.R. Diwakar and his wife, Radhabai, wended towards the road leading to Ankola. The leaders and their followers were lustily cheered as they proceeded. The Congress Committee had issued instructions that in other places, contraband salt brought from coastal areas was to be openly bought and sold and the Government was to be invited to penalise according to its own law. The Congress had called upon the whole nation to be fearless and be ready even for the utmost sacrifice of laying down their lives in vindication of their right to be independent.

Deshpande was among those selected by Gandhiji to organise the campaign. He went to Ratnagiri and organised the satyagraha. Then, he and hundreds of his followers brought contraband salt to Belgaum in small gunny

bags. At a public meeting held at the market chowk, Deshpande sold in auction the contraband salt on the very day, the 6 April, when Gandhiji broke the same law by preparing salt illegally on the sea-shore at Dandi. Deshpande was immediately arrested and sent to gaol in Belgaum. He was sentenced to six months imprisonment. Later, he was removed to the Ratnagiri gaol. His *vatan* property was also confiscated. Narayanrao Joshi, his colleague who broke the law with Deshpande, was likewise arrested and sentenced.

Deshpande told the members of his family not to get alarmed. He impressed upon them that he was among the patriots chosen by the Almighty to suffer for the national cause and such a privilege would not come to anybody for the bidding.

In a letter to Pundalik, Deshpande said that the gaol life gave him the required time for self-introspection and for preparing himself to suffer in a greater measure for the cause. In another letter Deshpande said that for his self-purification the penance of gaol life was imperative and hoped that his gaol life would spur him to further patriotic endeavours, regardless of sacrifice and suffering.

Deshpande observed also that it was a pleasure for him to suffer for the cause of the country. While out of gaol, he had enjoyed all material comforts. But, they gave him less pleasure than the gaol comforts, which were indeed unenviable. So long as his motherland was unfree, he could not lead a life of ease, he underlined.

In yet another letter, Deshpande remarked why should he bother about comforts while the gaol life would bring him glory as a patriot. And, he would ask for no other reward. He drew inspiration constantly from the great



lives of Dilip and Harishchandra, Rama and the Pandavas, and no less from his erstwhile mentor, Tilak.

Describing his daily routine in gaol, Deshpande stated that he got up from the bed at about 4 a.m. He walked for 3 to 4 hours within the compound. He had unlimited hot water for bath. After lunch, he would relax but not take siesta. He studied the Gita and went through the supplied newspapers. At about 8 p.m., he went to bed.

At Hudli, a camp for training volunteers and workers had been set up. It sent trained volunteers and workers to Belgaum and other towns in the district to offer *satyagraha*. Pundalik and Baburao Thakur, among other local leaders, visited the neighbouring villages daily to enthruse the people to participate in the campaign as well as to recruit volunteers for *satyagraha*. Within a few days, as many as 725 volunteers and workers had courted arrest.

Earlier, in 1928, when the Simon Commission was in India, demonstrations were held against it all over the country. Deshpande organised protest meetings in Belgaum and other towns. The slogan of 'Simon, go back' rent the air everywhere for many days.

Gandhiji was arrested at Karadi but the movement went ahead with such extreme steps as the raid by peacepledged volunteers on the Darshana salt depot.

When the salt *satyagrahis* were languishing behind prison bars, Gandhiji chose to cheer them up, while warning them that it was only the start of their suffering. In a letter of 10 February 1931, Gandhiji told Deshpande, "If ever a truce is declared, restoration of property like yours is a certainty. Meanwhile, it is well that we become houseless, landless and luckless. Under organised despotism, lucklessness is luck, poverty a blessing, riches a

curse; evil is enthroned, good is nowhere. In one clause, all values are transposed. We have only felt from afar the heat of the fire we must pass through. Let us be ready for the plunge. That is my reading just now. And, it fills me with joy. A halting peace will be dangerous and I can see no sign of real peace coming."

In the North Kanara district, a no-tax campaign was carried on by the rural people. Dr. R.R. Diwakar, Srinivasrao Koujalgi, Hanumanthrao Koujalgi, R.S. Hukkerikar, N.S. Hardikar and Thimmappa Naik were among the Congress leaders who were very active. On 13 April, the last day of the National Week, several batches of volunteers from different parts of North Karnataka converged at Ankola and joined the *satyagraha* camp. When the District Magistrate demanded the disbandment of the camp, he met with stiff opposition. Thereupon, he ordered the arrest of all the leaders on the spot; they were all, later, sentenced to gaol life. On 26 April, the *satyagraha* camp was, however, restored; Dr. Hardikar took charge of it. A committee was set up to organise the campaign more vigorously. Patels at several villages resigned from their service and joined the agitation. The no-tax campaign reached its zenith at Sirsi and Siddapur. Salt pans at Sanekatta were looted. Cutting of toddy trees was resorted to on a large scale. Forest *satyagraha* was also launched. The success of the campaign was so magnificent that Karnataka came to be recognised as Gandhiji's province, only next to Gujarat.

The Government had invited the Congress to participate in the Second Round Table Conference at London. As a preliminary step, there were talks between Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, and Gandhiji which led to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact on 5 March 1931. In consequence, there was the suspension of the movement on the one



hand and the withdrawal of the repressive measures on the other. The way was thus cleared for the Congress to participate in the proceedings of the Round Table Conference. Gandhiji as the sole representative of the Congress attended the same but returned empty-handed to Bombay on 28 December 1931. The Congress Working Committee reviewed the situation. It noted that the Government had not implemented the provisions of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and repressive measures had already been set in motion by the bureaucracy. The Working Committee, therefore, on the advice of Gandhiji, sent a kind of ultimatum saying that if proper amends were not made, the Congress would be forced to resume the Civil Disobedience movement. Lord Willingdon, the new Viceroy, was in no mood to concede anything; he was on the war path. Gandhiji was arrested at Bombay on 4 January 1932. Jawaharlal Nehru was sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment. Other national leaders were also gaoled. The whole movement was renewed including the no-tax campaign in Karnataka. Deshpande was arrested at his Kumri Ashram in Hudli village on the night of 7 January 1932. He was sentenced to one year gaol life. He was lodged in Yervada gaol at Pune. After about two months, however, he was set at liberty. When Mrs. Sarojini Naidu was arrested on 23 April, she nominated Deshpande to succeed her as the Congress Dictator. He was the fifth Dictator. He was arrested on 24 June, and lodged in the Hindalga gaol. Over 500 political prisoners had already been lodged there among whom were Kalelkar and Pundalik. After four days in gaol, Deshpande was given unasked a conditional release. As he did not honour the conditions, he was taken back to gaol the very next day, 29 June, and given a sentence of one year simple imprisonment for violating the conditions. In the gaol, he was in the company of R.R. Diwakar and several

other co-workers. A month later, on 28 July, he was transferred to the Yervada Central Prison. He met there Jamnadas Dwarkadas, S.A. Belvi, and several other friends, who had been similarly imprisoned.

The whole movement went on unabated till it was withdrawn in 1934, following the Patna resolution of the All-India Congress Committee.

Though the no-tax campaign in Karnataka ended, there was the responsibility of 800 and odd families in Sirsi, Siddapur and Ankola talukas who had lost their all—land, houses and costly movables—as a result of attachments and confiscations by the ruthless officers of the Government. Deshpande thought of providing some relief to them. By then, Dr. R.R. Diwakar was out of gaol and he put his shoulders to work along with D.P. Karmarkar. They collected some funds through a committee, set up under the chairmanship of K.F. Nariman. Apart from it, it was decided to meet Gandhiji and acquaint him with the situation and also report to him the brave stand of the peasantry of Karnataka.

Deshpande and Diwakar met Gandhiji and narrated to him briefly the story of the no-tax campaign in Karnataka including the plight of the peasants who lost everything. Gandhiji had a small sum of Rs. 3,000 on hand and readily handed it over. But, he said that no organised relief on behalf of the Congress should be provided as 'that goes against the dignity of the heroic stand of the peasants and it will also lead to the demoralisation of the sufferers'. At the same time, he emphasised that while it might not be good for the Congress to take up relief work, the prominent Congress workers ought to see that private and personal relief was forthcoming and some kind of minimum relief was ensured. When it was pointed out



that Sardar Patel was arranging relief on a big scale to the suffering peasants in Gujarat, Gandhiji said that Sardar Patel was responsible for it and his advice was the same to him as to them.

After release from imprisonment, Gandhiji undertook a nationwide tour for the uplift of Harijans. His tour in Karnataka in 1934 was organised by Deshpande who accompanied him and translated his speeches into Kannada at public meetings.

In the same year, when Bihar suffered the nature's fury of earthquake, Deshpande collected funds and materials from every strata of society in every part of the province and sent them to Dr. Rajendra Prasad at Patna.

## 2

Deshpande organised the Gandhi Seva Sangh's third annual conference in his native village of Hudli in April 1937. The weeklong conference was attended by Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Vinoba Bhave, Sarojini Naidu, Kripalani, C. Rajagopalachari, J.C. Kumarappa, Jamnalal Bajaj, Shankarrao Deo and others.

The Government of India was then preparing the ground for introducing provincial autonomy under the Act of 1935. It was a new chapter that was opening in the constitutional history of India and the Gandhi Seva Sangh members had to decide if it was worthwhile to participate in the ensuing elections. The mood of the members, to begin with, was against entering the legislatures.

The conference commenced on 16 April. On the second day, wholly unexpected and unprecedented rains lashed the village, throwing pell-mell all arrangements made for

the conference including those for lodging and boarding for the leaders and the workers. The rains continued the next day also, rendering the situation worse. Deshpande did not get disheartened. Steeling his heart and mobilising the available resources, he accepted the challenge and with speed and efficiency provided alternative facilities which drew spontaneous appreciation of the guests.

Welcoming the gathering at the conference, Deshpande reviewed briefly the work under the constructive programme that was in progress in Karnataka.

Inaugurating the session, Gandhiji advised the members at the outset to change the name of the Sangh. "Worship the ideals I stand for, not me," he implored and continued, "measure each activity of yours with the yardstick of truth and non-violence. My faith in truth and non-violence becomes stronger every day. And, as I go on applying these principles to my life, I go on making progress and with that my ideas acquire a fresh quality."

On 18 April at the instance of Deshpande, two marriages and two thread ceremonies were performed at Kumri Ashram. Gandhiji blessed the new couples. Advising the boys who underwent the thread ceremony, Gandhiji said, "Before you do anything, you should ask yourselves whether what you are doing is right or wrong. The sacred thread is useful from this stand-point."

The conference adopted a resolution that those Sangh members who would be advised to enter the legislatures by the Congress Working Committee, might do so.

In his concluding remarks, Gandhiji said that those who did not want to go to the legislatures might very well carry out the constructive programme. The Sangh, it was explained existed for the very purpose of constructive



work, for making it interesting and spreading it from Kashmir to Cape Comorin and from Karachi to Dibrugarh. Constructive work had been regarded as the mark of truth and non-violence. For its success, contact had to be established with three crores of voters. In order to make this contact effective, if some members of the Sangh had to enter the legislatures, it became a clear duty of the Sangh to make provision for it.

Deshpande felt naturally proud that Gandhiji could spend some days at his ashram and discuss some important problems there. There was a sense of fulfilment in him since he was one of the most devoted followers of Gandhiji and Gandhiji had favoured him by staying with him along with the best of his colleagues for a few days.

### 3

Once the Congress Working Committee decided upon fighting the elections, the whole psychology of most of the Congress workers underwent a change. It was a radical swing from extreme left of having no faith in any legislature in the matter of giving power to the people, to the right of belief in some good accruing from elections and elected governments even under the British suzerainty. The basic change was that even worthwhile Congressmen began to dream of power and one could see then the beginning of scramble for tickets and other opportunities among the Congress workers.

By 1934, Dr. Diwakar had come out of gaol and was busy with relief work for sufferers of the no-tax campaign and with taking over *Samyukta Karnataka* daily of Belgaum on behalf of the Trust he had created. In the meanwhile, there was a question of the presidentship of the Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee. At a meeting

held in Ranebennur, Deshpande was elected as the President and he thus became the dispenser of tickets for candidates for the forthcoming elections.

A new chapter in the history of the Congress organisation in Karnataka began with the elections for the Bombay Assembly in 1935-36. It could be said without exaggeration that Deshpande was equally an adept at playing the game of elections, as he had proved to be a brave fighter for independence and a good organiser of khadi and other constructive activities in Karnataka. He had one great advantage and that was he was equally known and popular in Maharashtra. Since Bombay was then a composite State, consisting of parts of Karnataka, Gujarat and Maharashtra, he utilised his closeness to Gandhiji and Patel as well as his influence with Shankarrao Deo and other Maharashtrians for the purpose of balancing forces in the incoming legislature. In fact, it is well-known that when the Chief Minister of Bombay had to be chosen, it was the opinion of Deshpande which prevailed in installing B.G. Kher instead of some others who were hankering after the office and bringing pressure on the Congress High Command. Kher was a man known for probity and sobriety. He knew Kannada and could carry on simple conversation as he had spent his boyhood in Kundgol, a small town near Hubli. The new role which Deshpande was called upon to play did not find him wanting in the skills necessary to balance human forces for the good of the general public.

It is true that Deshpande himself never thought of entering the legislature but, both as a seasoned leader and the Provincial Congress President, it became his responsibility to pick and choose proper persons to represent the electorate and at the same time not to allow the constructive work to suffer. He was aware of the com-



munal sensibilities of the area also. As the Provincial Congress Committee was constituted of the Kannada-speaking areas of Bombay, Madras and Coorg with the princely State of Mysore for purposes of constructive activities, it was quite a good game in balancing forces areawise, communitywise and interestwise, that is, urban and rural as well as the rich and the poor. Deshpande summoned all his experience in public life which he had gathered under the leadership of Tilak in his earlier career and the sober comprehensive approach he had developed under the leadership of Gandhiji later. Though earlier he was looked upon as one who was not very committed to the cause of Kannada and not too eager for a linguistic province of Karnataka, he soon made up for the deficiency. Poised as Belgaum is between Maharashtra and Karnataka, Deshpande had more intimate contacts with Maharashtra and he was known as a great orator in Marathi. It did not, however, require much effort for him to be known as one of the most effective speakers in Kannada too. His oratorical powers both in Kannada and Marathi stood him in good stead in endearing the masses both in Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Gandhiji himself was not arrested. So was Deshpande. He asked Gandhiji for permission, notwithstanding his indifferent health. It was refused. Deshpande felt greatly disappointed.

When Jamnalal Bajaj remarked that Deshpande's tendency would not allow him to stay out, Gandhiji observed that he must learn self-control which was necessary. Gandhiji added, "I have not allowed Konda Venkatappaya, Rajendra Prasad and Syed Mohmud. I want to preserve them for a greater fight. It may come at any time. That would be a great fight and I can take work

from men like Gangadharrao at that time. I must preserve them for that.”

## 4

Deshpande as the President of the Provincial Congress Committee encouraged agitations for responsible government in the Princely States in Karnataka. There was a police firing in Ramdurg in 1939. Deshpande visited the town and made a report to Gandhiji. Dr R.R. Diwakar, Srinivasrao Koujalgi and N.S. Hardikar also visited the town and sent a report. Their report concluded, “We feel that the officers have acted tactlessly to a great extent and allowed the police to have their way. We believe that they could have controlled the situation if they had acted a little more patiently and put the workers of the Prāja Sangh on their honour as they had done many a time before. But, though there was provocation, we do not think that it was so great as to arouse the brute in man and it must be laid at the door of the highly inflammable temper of the people. They seemed to have readily believed the rumours and got infuriated. The events only show that the Praja Sangh had no control over the forces of violence which were hiding in the people. . . . It is a clear warning to all workers in the field and every one must realise that before one feels sure that the people are rightly trained and disciplined in non-violence, it is unwise to begin any great mass movement.”

Commenting on it, Gandhiji said, “Over 2,000 villagers had collected with the set purpose of wreaking vengeance. They were intent upon releasing the President and other prisoners. The popular fury was wanton, cruel and deliberate. Congressmen cannot escape blame for the savagery of the people. The Raja of Ramdurg, a friend of the Congress, deserved a better treatment.



Purge the Congress ranks of violence in thought, word and deed."

There was an official enquiry into the Ramdurg disturbances. Deshpande was among those who tendered evidence. He was publicly ridiculed for the stand he had taken. On learning it from Dr. N. S. Hardikar, Gandhiji commented, "Ramdurg is bad business. I can only advise mute suffering. Train your workers in the practice of non-violence. This presupposes a living faith on your part in the efficacy of non-violence under all circumstances."

Deshpande attended the Brindavan session of the Gandhi Seva Sangh's conference held in May 1939. During the discussions, a member complained that there was an opposition to the spread of Gandhian thought in Karnataka. Gandhiji burst out, "If things are going wrong in Karnataka, let us kill Gangadharrao!" Deshpande complained that socialists accused the Gandhians as intolerant and narrow-minded. Gandhiji quietly replied, "Search your hearts. Be as gentle of speech as I am. Follow me. Socialists come to me frowning but leave smiling. Have faith in their honesty."

Deshpande also attended the next annual conference, held at Malikande in Bengal in February 1940.

## 5

The war situation soon came to be so uncomfortable for Britain that there was a possibility of some steps being taken to meet the Indian demand. C. Rajagopalachari wanted Indians to be firm and speak with one voice. In a letter to Deshpande on 24 January 1942, he stated the British Government's attitude about the independence of India.

The All-India Congress Committee, which met in Bombay on 7 and 8 August, gave the call under the leadership of Gandhiji. At a meeting of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee at Belgaum on 5 August, Deshpande declared that their impending fight would be total and last and Gandhiji would himself spell out the programme after the A.I.C.C. gave him the mandate. Deshpande attended the A.I.C.C. session.

Addressing the session, Gandhiji said, "I want you to adopt non-violence as a matter of policy, although with me it is a creed." The actual struggle was not started the moment the resolution was passed. Gandhiji, in no uncertain terms, said at the A.I.C.C. meeting, "You have only placed all your powers in my hands. I will now wait upon the Viceroy and plead with him for the acceptance of the Congress demand. That process is likely to take two or three weeks." The British Administration in India had no intention to receive Gandhiji. With lightning speed, it rounded up all leaders everywhere, not excluding Gandhiji. Before the dawn of 9 August, most of them had been taken into custody. The day, of course, was marked by hartal throughout the country and at almost all cities and towns, wild protest demonstrations were staged.

Gandhiji, on the eve of his arrest, gave a message of 'Do or Die' to the people. It read, "Every one is free to go to the fullest length under non-violence. Create complete deadlock by strikes and other non-violent means. *Satyagrahis* must go out to die, not to live. They must seek and face death. It is only when individuals go out to die that the nation will survive."

Deshpande was not then a member of the Working Committee. He learnt that all the Working Committee



members had been arrested. The police came in search of him but his whereabouts could not be traced. During the three days he was in Bombay, he made preparations for continuance of the struggle. He met many friends and co-workers and gave them instructions. He then quietly left for Belgaum. On his arrival at the railway station in Belgaum, he was arrested. He was lodged in the Hindalga gaol.

A few days later, many prisoners were affected by gastro enteritis and some of them died. There was a great commotion in the prisoners' camp. The Superintendent of the gaol, who was an Englishman, summoned the armed police to take charge of the situation. The police entered the wards threatening the prisoners with their rifles. Seeing the panic-stricken prisoners, Deshpande got enraged. He went straight to the Superintendent and told him, "We are not afraid of your bullets. Do you not know we are a courageous people? We have demanded the British to quit India. If you want to shoot, shoot me first." So saying, he removed his shirt and stood with an open chest. Amazed at his courage, the Superintendent was dumb-founded. The police had to make a quick retreat. The gaol medical staff and local doctors arranged for speedy and adequate treatment of the sick prisoners.

Later, Deshpande was transferred to the Nasik Central Prison. He was released after 24 months of detention. He then sent a report to Gandhiji. In reply, Gandhiji advised him, "You must keep yourself in good health. You have yet to render a lot of service."

While Deshpande was in prison, several other Congress leaders and workers in Karnataka went underground and carried on the campaign with the active sup-

port of the local people. R.R. Diwakar sent a report in February 1944 to Gandhiji at the Aga Khan Palace.

By the end of 1942, 60,230 persons had been arrested and over 26,000 of them had been convicted; 538 police firings had taken place resulting in 960 persons killed and 1,630 injured.

In 1945, Jinnah visited Belgaum. Deshpande showed rare courage in meeting him. He impressed upon Jinnah that both Hindus and Muslims there lived like brothers, whatever were their differences, perfect harmony between them prevailed. Jinnah cryptically replied, smiling, "Why not? That is my grievance!"



# XI

## Last Days

### 1

AFTER INDIA became politically free and independent, Deshpande endeavoured more earnestly than before for the liquidation of the Princely Order. He corresponded with many leaders and brought pressure for the realisation of the objective.

To one of his letters, A.B. Latthe, then Adviser to the Maharaja of Kolhapur, replied on 1 January 1948,

“The will of the people may be ascertained by plebiscite. But, in the midst of ignorance of political life and prejudices of communalism, popular will as gathered in a plebiscite may be far from satisfactory. Rulers are drifting in such a way that merger of States seems inevitable.” He was in favour of a loose federation whereunder the Princes could retain the revenue administration of their states in their hands and federate for legislative and non-revenue administrative purposes. He wanted the Princes to limit their privy purse to the minimum in order to leave to the Federation sufficient resources for providing an efficient administration for the country. He was, however, not sure that the scheme would succeed ‘in the present chaotic conditions of the public opinion in the States and with the concealed selfishness of some of the rulers’.

Deshpande was happy when the princely states were

merged one after another in neighbouring provinces.

He was equally happy when the unification of Karnataka was achieved in 1956.

It is a wrong reading of the recent history of India, as Dr. R.R. Diwakar points out, to say that either the demand for linguistic provinces or their formation on linguistic basis was and is anti-national or chauvinistic. The basic principle of democracy and democratic functioning requires that the language of the masses has to be the medium of education, legislation and administration, and of the spread of culture of the people concerned. Long before any such movement started in India, the British Government of the day split the huge sprawling presidency of Calcutta into Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, purely for educational and administrative purposes. It was Gandhiji who was a staunch nationalist and yet whose love of his mother-tongue, Gujarati, was unmatched. It was he who split the whole of India into linguistic provinces in 1920 for the purpose of Congress work and Congress organisation, as he was convinced that the Congress message could reach the masses most effectively only through the respective regional languages. It was that initiative which went on gathering strength for the demand of linguistic provinces, which materialised in due course. Even in the monolithic and dictatorial huge mass of the U.S.S.R., Stalin, who was the commissar for nationalities, saw to it that Russia, for educational and administrative purposes, was parcelled into linguistic groups. In many cases, he saw to it that languages which had no scripts were provided with one and their respective local cultures were promoted through them.

Deshpande, born of a Kannada-speaking family in a village wholly Kannada, must be counted as a Kannadiga



*in toto*. But since, Belgaum, the district headquarters, happened to be the habitat of Kannada and Marathi-speaking people, and since it was nearer to Pune and Bombay, both dominated by Marathi, Marathi acquired a prestige status. Deshpande was taught in a Marathi school and his connections with Maharashtra and Marathi-speaking leaders grew close in course of time. Of all the districts of Karnataka, Belgaum advanced sooner in the matter of political awakening and the influence of Tilak and his powerful weekly *The Kesari* kept up the lead. And, it was Tilak who visited Belgaum and other places in the district in 1906 who advised Deshpande to be equally acquainted with the Kannada language and culture to be able to lead the Kannada people. Things were developing on healthy lines and the Swadeshi movement of 1905 spread to the whole of Karnataka. But, stray incidents of clash between over-enthusiastic people both in Marathi and Kannada camps aggravated the situation and some leaders of the Kannada group thought Deshpande was not very enthusiastic for the Kannada cause and for the unification of the Kannada-speaking areas. The movement for linguistic provinces went on gaining ground and the Congress set its seal of approval. When the Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee was formed on linguistic basis with its headquarters at Gadag, Deshpande became its President. It is true that he was neither vociferous nor over-enthusiastic about the unification. It was not because he was not keen about it but because he thought and rightly too that priority had to be given to the struggle for national freedom and the formation of linguistic provinces would follow as it did. A similar view was expressed in an oblique way by Gandhiji when Dr. N.S. Hardikar, on behalf of the protagonists of unification, urged him on the eve of his departure to London for the Round Table Conference, not to forget the

cause of Karnataka unification in the future constitutional set up of India. Gandhiji simply said, "ye of little faith", meaning thereby that one should not distrust the leaders as they would certainly attend to every important issue.

After Independence, protagonists of linguistic provinces became restive. They kept up the agitation and progressively maintained its tempo. Andhra and Karnataka were foremost in this agitation. At last, in response to mounting public pressure, Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister, appointed a high-level commission with a view to make recommendations on reorganisation of states on linguistic basis. It consisted of Fazl Ali as chairman and H.N. Kunzru and K.M. Panikkar as members. The commission called for representations and toured the country. In view of the seniority and old age of Deshpande, the commission decided to meet him in his house at Belgaum. It was both an honour for Deshpande and due respect for his views on this important question, especially because he was a citizen of Belgaum, a person who had enjoyed in his public life the confidence of both Marathi and Kannada people. He was also known as a Gandhian and one who would value his words and not play with his convictions.

In his detailed talks with the members of the Commission, Deshpande made it abundantly clear that there was a strong case for the formation of a linguistic state for the dominantly Kannada-speaking people and that Belgaum should be included in that state. His views were categorical and unequivocal, and were given due weight by the Commission. At the same time, Deshpande observed that there was a strong case for Nipani to get merged in Maharashtra. When a delegation from Nipani waited on him, Deshpande reiterated his view.



## 2

In 1950, Deshpande was felicitated for his services at a public function in Bombay, S.K. Patil presiding. In the same year, he was likewise honoured at Pune, Bhau Saheb Soman presiding; B.G. Kher spoke eloquently about the head and heart of the chief guest. On 24 June 1951, Deshpande was felicitated at an all-party function at Belgaum. G.V. Mavlankar presided over the function. He was presented with a silver replica of the Ashoka pillar. R.R. Diwakar and N.S. Hardikar were among those who paid rich tributes to the yeoman services of Deshpande extending to over half a century. Replying to felicitations, Deshpande urged Congressmen to work for the economic freedom of the country, forgetting their political and other differences. "Behind those differences, there is the innate goodness of heart", he reminded them. His 80th birthday was also celebrated at a function in Belgaum in August 1951.

Deshpande spent the last years of his life in spiritual pursuits, having become totally disgusted with political immorality which prevailed everywhere in the country. Sometimes, he used to ask himself the question: "Is it for this that we fought and won freedom?"

While in search of peace of mind, Deshpande came into contact with Dr. R.D. Ranade, the great mystic and philosopher. Dr. Ranade told him that it was time to renounce worldly attachments and turn towards God. Deshpande became a nam-dhari and followed his guru's instructions faithfully.

Religiosity and spirituality are two different things, though there is confusion about the meaning and practice of both. While religiosity arises out of adherence to the theology and ritual of one of the current traditional

religions, such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, spirituality is transcendental in its approach and is unorthodox in its practice of prayer, meditation and such other disciplines. As R.R. Diwakar points out, orthodoxy and conservative beliefs have a strong hold on the minds of people given to religiosity. Spirituality is far more liberal in its approach to spiritual experiences and is individualistic and mystical as regards such experiences. While religiosity is often institutionalised, spirituality tries to be original and creative in its search after the reality of the Supreme Spirit.

Deshpande, like any other person born of parents following traditional religious forms and practices carried on faithfully the norms set down for generations. When he began to take part in public life, at the time of the Swadeshi movement and a bit earlier, he organised and participated in Ganeshotsava. While the annual observances were religious in form, they were oriented in educating the people about their culture and inculcating in them the national spirit. In fact, Ganeshotsava and Shivaji Jayanti celebration started in Pune by Tilak and they spread throughout Maharashtra and some parts of Karnataka, notably Belgaum, Bijapur, Gulbarga and Bangalore.

After Tilak passed away in 1920, the most important influence which swayed Deshpande's mind was that of Gandhiji. Apart from the political, social and economic views of Gandhiji, what attracted him were his prayers, his moral eminence, his selflessness, his simplicity of life and his profound faith in God as the law-giver. Deshpande in his own village of Hudli established a small ashram where certain of the observances of the Gandhi ashram held sway. In later life, when Deshpande ceased to take any active part in public life, he developed love for



spiritual life. He had been initiated by the Swami of Inchgiri and had retired to a hermit-like life in a small village called Nimbali. In the course of developing a mood of spiritual practices, Deshpande looked upon Ambu Maharaj as his guide and guru. He was convinced that real inner peace of the spirit was available only through spiritual practices with full faith in them. In his last days, Deshpande turned to intense spirituality and its cultivation by disciplines which are well-known but which usually pass from person to person in a kind of initiative process.

### 3

Deshpande's end came suddenly in the early morning of 30 July 1960 at his residence in Belgaum. The previous night, he was quite cheerful and talked to his family members as usual. There were no signs even of exhaustion. He went to bed at about 11 p.m. when the family members dispersed to sleep to their rooms. The next morning, at about 5.30, he got up from bed and was walking up and down in the veranda in front of his room, when he collapsed. He was pronounced dead by the doctor who examined him.

The people of Karnataka and Maharashtra in particular and of India in general grieved at the loss of a great son of India who toiled, suffered and sacrificed for the freedom.

A meeting of the citizens of Belgaum, Rao Saheb Patwardan of Pune presiding, mourned the passing away of one who was at once a distinguished citizen of Belgaum and a great national leader. The Karnataka members of Parliament, meeting at Delhi, Mr. Subramanyam presiding, mourned his death.

Hartal was observed in Belgaum and several other towns.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India, felt a personal loss, as Deshpande was his very close associate in Congress as well as constructive work. He observed that Deshpande's rich contribution to public life of India, particularly of South India, would long be remembered by his countrymen.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad also said, "Gangadharrao was among those few who in the early days of their youth took to national service, regardless of sacrifice and suffering. He worked for a long period of time under the leadership of Lokmanya Tilak. To him must go the credit for mass awakening and organization in Maharashtra and North Karnataka during those days. In 1924, a Congress session was held at Belgaum. Naturally, he was chosen the chairman of the reception committee. We came to know then not only of his organizing skill but also of his tremendous efficiency. Day and night, he went about on horse-back supervising the arrangements and giving instructions. It was Gandhiji who presided over the session."

B.D. Jatti, who later became a Vice-President of India, felt that the State had lost a stalwart who fought alike for the independence of the country and for the unification of Karnataka. Vaikuntlal Mehta said that in "Gangadharrao's death, the nation lost a great leader and a sincere constructive worker." Kaka Kalelkar, mourning the loss of "the Lion of Karnataka," prayed, "May his noble example inspire his compatriots of the present and succeeding generations for national service!" S.V. Krishnamoorthy Rao, then Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha, said, "He was a veteran fighter in the cause of freedom and



the creation of the Karnataka province. He was a sure source of inspiration to all of us. We are poorer by his death."

B.N. Datar, who was a citizen of Belgaum, besides Minister in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, then, observed, "His life and activities were so associated with India and the Congress in general and Karnataka in particular for over 60 years that it is difficult to believe that he has left us for ever. His was the most powerful personality whom it is difficult for us to forget. It is, however, a matter of some consolation that he died at a ripe age." Dr. N.S. Hardikar, Founder of the Hindustani Seva Dal, pointed out that Deshpande was rightly called "the Lion of Karnataka" for his heroic lead to the people in the freedom movement. Dr. R.R. Diwakar, then Chairman of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, observed that Deshpande earned the name of "Gandhi Rajya" for Karnataka by his great patriotic endeavours.

Sri Prakasa, then Governor of Maharashtra, said that Deshpande was a strong link between two generations who fought for the freedom of the country.

*Samyukta Karnataka*, the leading daily of Hubli, wrote a long editorial highlighting the achievements of Deshpande as an ardent freedom fighter and a true constructive worker, whose services spanned the 19th and 20th centuries. It pointed out that Deshpande played a dominant role in 1916 in bringing back Lokmanya Tilak and his followers to the Congress-fold and Mahatma Gandhi had called him "the great Gangadharrao".

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